MAID and WIFE

Carolyn Beecher

Clara M. Pace.
June 2nd 23.

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"Why have you done all this for Rogers?"

Maid and Wife

By CAROLYN BEECHER

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With Frontispiece

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To My Mother

MAID AND WIFE

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CHAPTER I

I HAD "finished a finishing school," as dad said, and had made my debut. I suppose in many ways my coming out party was like the formal introduction to society of hundreds of other girls, yet in some ways mine was the talk of the season. In the first place dad was scandalously rich, mother immensely popular. Quite a combination, you see. Mother really outdid herself. She gave the party at Maitland's, and I led the cotillion with Bob Merrick, the best dancer in our set. If Bob had been as clever at one end as he was at the other he would have been a dear. Unfortunately he was not.

The favors were lovely—silk parasols, fans, and bonbon dishes for the girls; cigarette holders and quaint little match safes for the men. They cost a small fortune. I know, for I was hunting for something in mother's desk and saw the bill.

A lot of girls came out that winter, so they were all there and we had a jolly time.

Two or three of the boys said they would rather dance with me than with the other girls, which didn't

make me enjoy myself less, especially when Graham Knowlton, the best society dancer in Chicago, told me I danced divinely.

The supper, all that anyone could wish for, was perfectly served. And I remember as we rode home in the small hours thinking that I was the happiest girl in the world. And again, as Minna undressed me and told me how lovely I looked in my silver-tissue coming-out gown, I sensed a certain contentment, a satisfaction with myself and my surroundings that was unusual. I was so accustomed to luxuries that I seldom gave them any thought.

When I think of all this now it seems ages ago that it happened, yet it has been but a short time. I often feel like pinching myself as did the old woman who lived under the hill, to see if indeed it were I. Oh, if we only could look ahead! Only see just a little in advance what the fates have in store for us! If the gods, upon whose knees we perch in sublime faith, would be kind and whisper of what the future held for us, would we do better or differently? I wonder!

Being born with a silver spoon in one's mouth certainly is pleasant; but just as certainly does it have its disadvantages. When the time comes that you have to use a pewter one, you forget what you are tasting, and remember only the spoon.

I have always been glad my parents called me "Sheila" instead of Mary, or Maud, or Florence. It

is such an uncommon name, and there is no nickname that fits it; so I have always been called Sheila.

When I made my debut I was a tall, slender, butterfly sort of a girl. I knew I was pretty. My mirror as well as my friends told me so. I had wavy brown hair, lots of it, and a nice clear complexion. I seldom used powder. I really didn't need it, and dad made an awful fuss if he saw any on my face; pretended he didn't want to kiss me. I had brown eyes and nice long lashes—mother said that was because she kept them trimmed when I was little; and Bob Merrick said my eyes had little gold flecks in them. He should have known, he was always staring at me. One thing, though, used to bother me dreadfully. In all the stories of lovely women I had ever read a Cupid's bow seemed to be the only kind of a mouth a beauty should have; and my mouth was as straight as could be, just like dad's. Mother had a mouth which curled up at the corners in the most bewitching way, and a lovely dimple in her little round chin. But my chin was square—that was like dad's, too, and without even a suggestion of a dimple. I tried awfully hard to be contented. I reasoned that a girl couldn't have everything. But it is discouraging to have such a fascinating mother. Sometimes I was tempted to go to a beauty doctor and have a dimple made, Florence Maybury did! But father would have been furious, so I didn't dare.

I simply adored dancing, so when the craze for

dancing struck town about three years ago I, to use my young brother's expression, "nearly danced my fool head off." I didn't, of course, although my feet used sometimes to feel as if they would drop off.

That was where Bob Merrick came in. Bob was a wonderful dancer, and he was handsome, too, even if he didn't have many brains. A girl likes to dance with a handsome man just as well as a man does with a pretty girl—other girls may not know he is a dunce, you know.

I've heard that girls get over such notions, and then they don't care what a man looks like so long as he has money. But I don't believe young girls ever feel like that. If Bob only had been as clever as he looked he would have been the 'nth wonder of the world. It was sad that all his brains were where he stepped on them. Mother was real cross when I told her that the only time he didn't bore me was when we were dancing.

I often used to wonder if I would be as popular, as sought after, if I weren't pretty? I would look in the glass and think that being good to look at was about the nicest thing in the world, and wonder what I would do, how I would feel, if I were ugly. No wonder plain girls are usually intellectual, that they try to be clever and do all sorts of queer stunts. They have to if they are to get any attention. Poor things!

One night at a small dinner I met Howard Bell.

"Be nice to him, dear. He's quite the smartest

man, and greatest catch I know," Clarice's mother, who was giving the dinner, said to me. She told me afterward that he belonged to one of the old Knickerbocker families of New York, and was enormously rich.

"But he's old!" I grumbled.

"Only thirty-five, Sheila. That's not old for a man."

"Almost old enough to be my father," I pouted. Dad was just forty-one.

"He dances wonderfully well," she added, smiling.

"Oh, if his feet are all right I don't care how old he is," I answered saucily. "I'll not look at his face."

Really, Howard Bell was a fine looking man. He was rather serious, and I was surprised that he cared for dancing.

He complimented me upon my looks, the becomingness of my gown, a pale pink affair, that cost a pile, but was so perishable it would rag out in no time.

Even if I did think him old, it made me feel good to be admired. It always gave me a little cuddly feeling toward myself when people said nice things to me. I guess it does to most girls if they would own up and tell the truth about themselves. That's what I am going to try to do—to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing BUT the truth about myself.

I used to wonder how on earth anyone got along without a maid—a personal maid. Once Minna was sick for nearly a week, and I had to get along with

the little assistance mother's maid could give me. It was awful—so I thought then. If people think that because a girl has wealthy parents, a fine home, and motor cars, she has nothing to do, why, they have another think coming. The year I came out I was the busiest little mortal you ever saw. I never had an idle minute. Mother used to worry for fear I would lose my looks with so much dissipation. But I didn't! Really, though, it was one continual round of luncheons, matinees, teas and dances. Between times I had to see dressmakers, manicures and hairdressers, to say nothing of the little charity work I tried to do. A society girl can put it all over a working girl, as far as keeping busy goes. I know!

Of course I was expected to make a brilliant marriage. That is, mother and all our relatives expected it. Father was in no hurry to get rid of me and often said:

"Have your fling, little girl, but remember that marriage is not a tea party. It is a very serious obligation."

I recall the various men I liked best. Most of them were quite young. Several of them I liked very well indeed—quite well enough, no doubt, had I been ready to marry, to live in the same house with, and see regularly at the opposite side of the table when I entertained. They all were reasonably intelligent, one or two even amusing. They would, I felt sure, be kind, and make life as smooth and pleasant as they could.

But I loved none of them. None of them qualified, judged by the standard I had set up in my own mind. There was not a single one of them whose near presence stirred me in the slightest. I wanted to be thrilled, and the only thrills I ever experienced were when I had an exceptional partner in dancing; or at some play which verged on melodrama.

After Christmas, Maud Harden was married. I was one of the bridesmaids. There were eight of us. Maud looked lovely in her white satin dress with some old lace of her grandmother's worn as a veil and to trim her corsage. I wished we had some old lace in our family, but we were not old enough for lace. All the bridesmaids wore violet tulle with big picture hats, and carried sweet peas, immense bouquets of them.

Keith Wilson, who was one of the ushers, told me I "had the bride beaten to a frazzle as far as looks went." I didn't of course. Maud is quite handsome, but I was glad he said it just the same.

Keith introduced me to Clark Cummings, an out-of-town man, one of the ushers.

That afternoon I went home literally walking on air. I had had a glorious day; had been admired to my heart's content, and had met a man who from the first attracted me, not because he could dance—he told me at once that he knew absolutely nothing of the new dances—but because he had a virile, vibrant personality. It fairly obtruded itself upon one.

I was in a fair way to get some of the thrills I so longed for.

Clark Cummings and I talked together longer than was *au fait* at a wedding reception. The girls looked curiously at me. Some of them, I knew, were envious; others wondering how I managed to monopolize the fascinating stranger.

He talked seriously, quietly, in a deep, musical voice:

"I love the open places. I have lived in them all my life. I couldn't breathe in the city for long. I should stifle," he told me when I confessed I loved dancing. Then he said, without appearing at all embarrassed, that he couldn't even dance the one-step.

"And I couldn't live in the country," I replied. "I don't see how anyone can endure the monotony of it—except, of course, for a few weeks in the summer. Even then I prefer the seashore or the mountains. The country is so lonely."

"Lonely!" he cried. "Why, I never knew the meaning of that word out there in God's country!" He waved his hand toward the west. "It is the loneliness of the city that appals me. You read a lot about the loneliness of the country; but what is it compared to that of a crowded city where you can walk the streets for hours and never see a familiar face; never receive a greeting? In the city you are just one of a multitude, a mob! I tell you, Miss Andrews, there is no loneliness in the world like it!"

Then he smiled at me. There was a sort of boyish sweetness in that smile in spite of his firm mouth and chin. I guess he thought he had been too serious.

For the first time in my life I felt a slight stirring of something new and strange within me, and unconsciously I commenced to fight against it.

"Oh, Sheila!" Clarice Dutton said the next day when we met for tea, "Isn't he handsome? You were a little pig to monopolize him. Why, he's as handsome as—an actor! and Maud told me he was only twenty-three."

No wonder I liked him better than thirty-five-year-old Keith Wilson.

"But he's from the country, Clarice, and says he doesn't like cities," I explained.

"I wouldn't care if he came from Timbuctoo, if he would look at me the way he did at you, Sheila. Honest, I thought he was going to swallow you. What will the 'shadow' say, I wonder? I saw him watching you." Bob Merrick being the "shadow" she referred to. One of the girls gave him that name because he was always trailing after me. It had stuck to him ever since.

"Oh, I don't care what Bob says, and you know it!" I quickly returned. It always annoyed me when the girls took it for granted that I belonged to Bob in any way.

Clark Cummings called almost immediately. I had a heavenly time, and I actually said some clever

things. Almost clever enough for a homely girl to have said. Clark seemed to know how to draw me out. I like to talk to men who can do that; it makes me sort of proud of myself. Anyway, he was a perfect dear.

I met him on Michigan avenue a few days afterward. It was a glorious day, and he turned and walked with me. Then he persuaded me to take luncheon with him. I knew very well that mother would not approve, but I just couldn't resist him.

He took me to a cheap little *table d'hôte* place. He was terribly masterful. It was great fun to be bossed for an hour or two, although I feared it might grow irksome if one had to stand it all the time. Most of the men I knew were absolutely servile in their deference.

Clark seemed not to realize the cheapness, the tawdryness of the restaurant. He appeared perfectly happy. Once he held my hand a moment when I reached for the salt, and said—right out loud—I'm sure the waiter heard him:

"I wonder if you know how sweet you are to a man like me who hasn't met many girls of your kind."

We talked about serious things all through our luncheon. Perfectly wonderful things they seemed to me. We hadn't been the least bit sentimental, yet I felt like crying when it was time to go.

I never had known time to pass so quickly.

I insisted that Clark call a taxi. I knew mother

would be anxious about me, if she were at home. When it came Clark jumped in beside me. The thrills I had so longed for were coming then all right. I was so happy that my breath caught in little gasps in my throat.

How I wished we lived further out! We reached home altogether too soon. When Clark helped me out and paid the cabby he said he would walk back. I noticed he didn't carry a big roll of money like Bob did, and I wondered if he walked to save money.

I saw Clark several times in the next two weeks. Of course he was invited everywhere, as he was a guest of the Hardens. I constantly thought of him as my ideal of a man.

Then one day he proposed. I saw it coming and at first thought I would try and stop him. Then I just couldn't resist letting him go on. He was very earnest and quiet. He told me he couldn't live without me; that he loved me with all his soul. For the first time since I had met him I saw him as a suppliant. He was humble. If he had kept his old masterful manner I don't believe I could have refused him. But just the moment he became humble his power to move me was gone. It just evaporated, not that I did not still like him a lot. But he gave me time to think about what mother said about his being poor. Whatever should I, Sheila Andrews, do as a poor man's wife? I thought of what it would mean to me to work in his kitchen, cooking his meals, and washing the dishes. I decided it would kill me

in a month. I often had pitied the girls who had to work in stores and offices, but this would be worse, much worse.

Once I went to see Lill Carpenter. She ran away and married a poor man, a clerk, or something equally horrid. She had a perfect love of a baby, but her house was small and mean. The furniture, too, was ugly and cheap. Her father was cross with her because she married Ed, and gave her nothing, not even his blessing, although he was rich. Lill had on a cheap cotton dress, and her nails didn't look as if they had been manicured in months. I thought of her and her mean little house while Clark was talking, and just thinking of her made it easier for me to say no.

In justice to Lill I must tell you that she claimed to be perfectly happy, and said she wouldn't change places with anyone in the world. That her only real trouble was the loss of her father's love. Her mother died before she ran away with Ed Carpenter.

Clark seemed to feel dreadfully. He turned as white as a ghost. He didn't urge me one bit; he appeared to know it would do no good. But just before he left he said:

"I am going back home to-morrow, Sheila, and perhaps never shall see you again. Should you ever really need a friend, no matter what the conditions, I will be that friend. Here is my address."

I almost cried as he gave me a card with his name and address. He talked just like the hero in a play

I had just seen. "You can reach me there if I am alive. I never leave the ranch that someone does not know where to reach me, or to forward any communication. You are sure you understand, Sheila? If you ever need me I will come," he repeated, in the very words of the stage lover.

I scarcely could restrain my tears, he spoke so solemnly, yet I knew I never should send for him, never let him know how near I came to saying yes. But I couldn't marry a poor man. It would be perfectly ridiculous for me to think of such a thing.

After Clark left I took up my dancing again in a way that called forth a reprimand from dad. I was restless, uncertain of myself. Still, I didn't grieve for Clark. I hadn't time. Neither had he impressed himself upon me strongly enough to cause me sorrow. Bob Merrick was delighted that Clark had "at last taken himself off" and we haunted *thé dansants* almost every day, the same as we had before he came.

Bob proposed to me on an average of once a week. He had done so ever since my coming out party. I laughed at him and treated his protestations of love as a joke, which peeved him.

I didn't tell mother every time Bob proposed, because she favored him. I don't think I have mentioned that he was disgustingly rich, and that he paraded the fact. Not that I objected to his money; "far be it from me," as he would say, but I hated the plebeian way he made a show of it.

Howard Bell also proposed. It was one night at a supper-dance. I was going to tell him he was too old, when he saved me the trouble.

"I know I am older than you are, Sheila, but I will know all the better how to care for you. I love you very dearly, and I am sure I can make you happy if you will marry me."

It was hard work, but I finally made him understand that I didn't want to marry him. That I didn't love him. Why, he never had given me even the tiniest, weeniest sort of thrill. When I told mother she looked and acted disappointed. But dear old dad said:

"That's right, dear, don't marry any man unless you love him. Money and position are all right, but they never take the place of love, even though some people do claim that it is out of date."

Father often made me laugh, he said such original things. I gave him a good hug and told him I was going to wait until I found someone just like him. Mother then said:

"You won't find anyone like your father, Sheila, so you may as well make up your mind to it."

CHAPTER II

My meeting with John Lawrie and mother's treatment of him, before she discovered who he was, were simply delicious. I met him in the most unconventional way. It was on an awfully windy day, and just as I came out of a shop my hat blew off. He chased it and brought it back to me, then walked home with me, "for fear I might lose it again."

I was the "only girl," the "ideal woman," and "his mate," from that moment. At least that was what he said; and strangely enough I think he meant it.

He actually made love to me every minute he was with me. He was not handsome in the least; yet was good to look at. He was not a large man, but tall, quick, and springy, and muscled like a panther. He had won honors in college athletics. He had a broad, high cheeked face, and deep gray eyes. You never could tell whether he was going to talk sense or Bernard Shaw. But he was making real love. There was no doubt about that.

I said I was going to be perfectly frank and tell the truth, in this, my own story. But I will not attempt to recount all the wild and lawless thoughts

which often scurried through my mind. Every girl has them. But I found out things about John; and my little toy balloon of romance that I had been so gaily floating on a string of sentiment was pricked to nothing in a minute.

I found that now I was filled with feminine longings and desires which heretofore had not troubled me. I had taken all the young men of my acquaintance, their attentions, as a matter of course. Marriage, when I thought of it at all, meant only more freedom, and a place in society no young unmarried girl could hope to hold. I never gave a thought to the duties and obligations a girl assumes when she marries, neither to what would be due the man. Ever since I had sent Clark Cummings away I had given up all idea of having thrills with a husband. He—the husband—would perhaps be an inconvenience. I hoped he would be an amusing one.

I was sort of sick and sore whenever I thought of Clark. Yet I was filled with a strange new zest for the puzzle of life. I longed to fit the pieces together to see if I could construct something worth while.

Bob, tired of asking me, had gone to father. Dad told him that it was something I must decide for myself. He would not interfere. I know dad looked upon Bob as a perfect nincompoop, but mother was getting anxious to see me settled, and she liked the idea of having Bob's money in the family. Not that we needed it—then. But that's the funny thing about

money; the more you have the more you want.

It seemed a prodigiously long time since Clark had left me, yet often I had a feeling that he was close to me. Ridiculous though it was, I felt it was proof that I still reigned in his heart, and, because I was selfish, I was glad.

My brother was fifteen years old, and quite a nice boy—as boys of his age go. I guess that fifteen, or around there, is a "trying age"—mother's expression. He certainly tried my patience, especially during his vacations. He teased me, made fun of my beaux, or played practical jokes on me until I was nearly wild. Father used to try to make him stop, but mother always made excuses for him. I have learned mothers are like that with boys.

Maud Harden gave a dinner. It was the first big affair she had given since she had returned from her wedding trip.

"I am going to have the honor of taking you in, Miss Sheila," Keith Wilson said to me. "Our hostess has issued special commands to that effect."

"At——?"

"My request," he interrupted.

"Isn't that jolly?" I returned, really pleased. "I've not seen you for an age."

"Do you know, Sheila, I have such an appetite for talk with you that I am convinced I sha'n't eat a thing. If I had known the pleasure in store for me I should have eaten my dinner before I came, then I should have had nothing to distract me."

Really that was quite a nice speech for Keith. He wasn't noted for flattery.

"Do you know, Sheila, I think you have changed. I don't quite know how to take you," he remarked later.

"I'll tell you a secret," I laughingly returned. "I've begun to think I am not to be taken at all."

"Oh, yes, you will! By force if in no other way. You can't escape your fate; so don't try."

That winter we went to Palm Beach, Miami, then Hot Springs. I had a perfect time. I just adored Palm Beach. Most girls do. Dad gave me a wonderful wardrobe. I danced and bathed and rode, went yachting, and then did it all over again to my heart's content. I met a lot of new young men who were, or seemed to be, devoted to me.

Dad didn't care much for Palm Beach, but was keen for Hot Springs. He was a wonderful horseman and the rides at the Springs appealed to him. Mother and I were neither of us quite ready to leave the Beach, but we gave in when dad said he didn't feel up to form and thought his riding would set him up again.

But I should have enjoyed myself much more had Bob Merrick remained in Chicago instead of following me. He sauntered into the hotel dining room one morning looking very much at home in his flannels, also very handsome. He acted surprised that I wasn't glad to see him.

"Town is a dreadful bore when you are away,

Sheila," he told me. "Then, too, I thought a couple of weeks at the Springs would do me good. I've been feeling rather seedy."

"Do him good!" I was disgusted. He was as fat and sleek as a Jersey cow, and I told him so, Mother said I wasn't ladylike. I guess I wasn't, but I was cross at him for coming.

I had met Clarence White at Palm Beach, and he too joined us at the Springs. Wasn't Bob jealous and cross! But I didn't mind. I rather enjoyed it. We rode and played golf or tennis all day long, Clarence and I. But Bob had his innings at night. He was too fat to ride, he pretended; too lazy to golf, or play tennis, but, as I have said before, he could dance. I had lovely evening dresses and the dandiest sport clothes. I often heard people make remarks anent "that smart Miss Andrews," which amused as well as flattered me. But everything has an end, so about the middle of March we returned home.

Bob had gone on a day or two before we did. He was cross, said I had treated him shamefully, and had flirted disgracefully with Clarence White. I only laughed at his ravings, so he got mad and left for home. Mother scolded me, but I guess he didn't feel so badly after all, for about an hour after we arrived a messenger brought me a big box of roses with his card, and "Welcome back to our windy city" scribbled in his handwriting.

In a day or two he called up and asked mother to

the opera, and me, too, of course. He had a dandy box, one where you could see and be seen. Sometimes I was ashamed of myself I treated Bob so badly, and wished I could care for him. But they say "Love goes where it is sent," and mine never had been sent to Bob's address.

We had a lovely evening. Keith Wilson, Howard Bell, and John Lawrie all came into the box at different times during the evening, much to my delight and Bob's discomfiture. They were so nice and friendly. I think that is the way it should be. Just because you don't want to sit opposite a man three hundred and sixty-five days in the year is no sign you never want to talk to him.

Clarence White showed up after we had been at home about two weeks. I was sure I should have to say no again. I knew the symptoms. I tried to put it off every way I knew, but it was no use. When a man makes up his mind to propose to a girl wild horses wouldn't stop him.

Well, Clarence told the same old story of being unable to live without me. As he was only twenty he would have to die young. I said "no" as gently as I could; but there were tears in his eyes when he said "Good-by—forever." He forgot to take his hat and James had to run after him with it. There was a peculiar look on James's face, but he was a perfect servant.

When I told mother she laughed and said:

"What, that boy!" But I felt sorry for him,

and that night after the lights were out I cried a little to think how dreadfully I must have hurt him to make him go out in the cold without his hat.

"Where's White?" Bob Merrick asked the next time I saw him.

"Gone home," I replied, and then I know I blushed and looked guilty.

"Another scalp," he groaned. "Poor boob." But in spite of his sympathetic if inelegant language I noticed he went away whistling.

Bob seemed to think that every time I refused another man it increased his chances. It didn't; it only made me feel sure I never should like any one well enough to marry. Yet I couldn't be Miss Andrews all my life. People who didn't know might say I never had had a chance to be Mrs. anything.

I often wondered why it was that I persisted in comparing every man I met with Clark Cummings. But I did, and always to their disadvantage. The idea that distance lends enchantment might have applied—I don't know. Had Clark been right there in Chicago, instead of way off on the coast, he might not have seemed so desirable. It is that way. Even after people die we endow them with virtue they never possessed, and think things about them totally at variance with the thoughts we had of them while living. So perhaps I was mistaken about Clark, and it was simply his absence which made me think him so attractive.

I had been having funny, sentimental dreams

about him, dreams which made me wake up sobbing, to find my pillow wet with tears.

In the morning following a dream of Clark I would awake with the feeling of lassitude which usually follows intense emotion. At times I was tempted to write to him, yet without the slightest idea of what I should say. Then again I felt that I never wanted to either see or hear from him again. I felt that I almost hated him because of the power he had to disturb me, even after the lapse of months.

I remember that often I was envious of my mother's graciousness, her poise, and elegant manners. I overheard one of her intimates say one day that if ever anyone was born to adorn society it was mother, and I agreed with her. Yet sometimes I wished that society did not claim so much of her time, that we could talk together more often; talk of something besides clothes and amusements. I especially felt this way when Clark Cummings was in my mind.

Once in a great while dad and I would have a regular talkfest. But I never said anything to him about Clark. He would tell me of his younger days, of my grandmother, who died before I was born; and say I looked like her, and that she was a brave, constant soul. They were poor in those days and grandmother had to do all her own work. But she had such a happy disposition, knew so well how to manage and kept her family so happy and contented that dad said they never realized it was a hardship to be poor.

"Oh, dad!" I interrupted one day, "I must tell you something Miss Pater, our language teacher, said to us just before I left school. She said that she hoped none of us would ever know poverty; never be obliged to work to earn our living. But that if we did she also hoped our wealth, our bringing up, would not prove a hindrance. Don't you think that was a queer speech?"

"No, dear, it was merely a sensible one from a woman who knew what she was talking about. If you were left to earn your living you would have all the poor girl has to contend with and much besides. Your easy life, your pampered childhood, would make it much harder for you to work than if I had been a poor man and you had been accustomed to labor. Pray God you may be spared the necessity to prove your teacher's words." He finished gravely while a shadow crossed his face and lingered in his kind eyes.

I laughed gaily at the idea of my being able to earn anything.

"Why, dad! anyone would willingly pay me to stay away. I couldn't earn my salt, as they say; and salt is the cheapest thing we eat, isn't it?"

These talks with dad always made me feel better and happier. I don't just know why, but they did. Sometimes I would sit on his knees and again I'd sit on a low chair beside him and lean against him as we talked. I loved to watch the play of expression on his face as he reminisced. It would pass from fun to

seriousness so quickly. While I do not think I was a bad daughter, yet I often have thought how much better I might have been; how much more unselfish. But I loved dad dearly, and now after the lapse of years it comforts me to believe he knew it.

Once he told me all about myself when I was a baby. He said I was such a soft, cuddly little thing, and that he had been glad that I was a girl. He used to hold me for hours, just happy because I belonged to him and mother. Always after he talked like this I would think how wonderful it would be to have a baby of one's own. I hoped if I ever had one that it would have dark gray eyes—Clark's eyes are the darkest gray—and a dimple like mother's. But, of course, I supposed I'd love any kind of a baby God sent me.

To meet dad you'd never think he would talk about babies and such things, he looked so dignified. He was dignified, too, but underneath the dignity was the kindest heart a man ever had. He talked to me sometimes about my "beaux" as he laughingly called them. He explained what he thought made up a "fine man." Then he told me to be careful to learn to detect the real from the veneer.

"My little girl will have to be careful that she is not caught with skin-deep polish," he said. "Find out what's underneath, dear."

"How can I tell?" I asked, more to make him talk than for a desire to know. Yet there flashed through my mind the thought that Clark Cummings had

something underneath, while some of the others, like Bob Merrick, were thickly veneered.

"It is hard to tell," dad mused. "But go slowly, Sheila. Take time to know a man. I'm in no hurry to be rid of my little girl. You've plenty of time."

"They'll say I am a failure if I'm not married, or at least engaged, my second season," I protested laughingly.

"Let them say it!" he replied. "Mrs. Grundy is a dame without a conscience. She would marry everyone off in a hurry just for the sake of having something to gossip about when she found them unhappy, because mismated."

Dad was terribly funny at times. He often said that money did not make happiness. That just enough to meet our real needs is enough if we are contented and happy in other ways. I asked him "What ways?" and he said:

"If you love the man you marry, my daughter, you won't think much of money, you'll be too busy thinking of him."

Father did say such original things. But I guess they must be true, because he was very wise.

I wished often that I knew just how much money one needed to be happy. Mother said Clark was as poor as a church mouse; and mice, especially church mice, act awfully hungry. There was one in our pew one Sunday, and he ate the wood. I'd hate to be always saving and scrimping, I thought.

One thing I used to do which pleased dad very

much. Every Sunday morning I walked to church with him. He never took the cars out on Sunday. Our chauffeurs always had the day to themselves. Of course mother went occasionally, but more often dad and I would go alone. Then after church, if the day were fine, we would take a walk along the lake.

After being with dad I used to feel as I did with Clark. I would feel capable of wonderful things and wish that something would come along so that I might prove myself. But as soon as I was by myself, or with the girls, this feeling would ooze out, and I would be perfectly content to be the foolish butterfly that I was.

Bob Merrick told me a story one night about some people we both knew which impressed me so strongly that I thought of it for days.

It was about their life together. She was a little plain sort of a woman, of good family, and had loads of money. He was big and handsome, popular, and all that. Bob told me she was always finding fault with him, and that she was shrewish enough to drive a man away from her. I some way felt sorry for her, and said so.

"I should think you would be sorry for him," Bob replied, "instead of wasting your sympathy on her."

"But, Bob, don't you see he is handsome, popular and everything, while she is so plain and insignificant. Perhaps she loves him and is jealous of him."

"That's one way to look at it," Bob laughed.

"Money doesn't always make happiness; does it, Bob?" I asked. "You know how rich she is."

"He'd never have married her if she hadn't been," he replied carelessly.

Father was right. Money didn't always bring happiness.

I made up my mind right there that I'd be very careful that no one married me for my money—rather for dad's, which of course would be mine some day. The one sure way to prevent it was to be positive the man I married had money too, plenty of it, like Bob Merrick; instead of being poor, like Clark Cummings.

I had been very gay and had not noticed that dad looked ill until mother spoke of it:

"I feel worried about your father, Sheila. He doesn't sleep well, and I have noticed that his appetite is failing."

"He would have told you if he felt sick," I tried to cheer, yet feeling conscience stricken that I had not observed a difference in dad.

"It may be partly my imagination," mother replied, "but he needs a change. Several times lately he has walked the floor half the night. I shall urge him to go away for a while."

A few hours afterward they brought dad home. He had had some kind of a stroke and had died sitting in his office chair.

They put him into the darkened drawing room. My heart ached with the pain of my own suffering,

though after the first wild outburst I tried to be brave for mother's sake. She had gone from one fainting spell to another, and then lay moaning, hard dry sobs shaking her whole body.

"See if you can't make her cry!" the doctor had said, and I had tried to do his bidding. But because I was young my own hurt seemed more than I could bear. I did not dream that just because I was young the hurt would fade away in time; and that I should be happy again.

"I can't bear it, father! I can't!" I cried as I knelt beside him. Then as mother's voice came to me I dried my eyes and staggered from the room.

"Where's Sheila? I want her."

"I'm coming, mother," I called softly as after one long, lingering look at father's face I closed the door. "Poor mother," I said aloud, "I'll have to take care of her now that father is gone." I had unconsciously come nearer the truth than I knew.

The funeral was over. We assembled in the library to hear what dad's lawyer had to say to us. The will, made long before, had been read, leaving everything of which he died possessed to his beloved wife, trusting to her love for the children. The old lawyer who had drawn this will was dead. He had been a frequent visitor to our house, and I had known him all my life. But this stranger with the cold, unsympathetic face and colder manner unaccountably chilled me, as I sat and impatiently waited what he had to say:

"Mr. Andrews died absolutely insolvent. When his debts are paid there will be nothing left. I doubt if even the house and furnishings can be saved. I think it wise to tell you this at once so that you may be saved needless outlays."

So we were poor! Even our home might have to go. I saw at once that mercifully mother had not grasped the meaning of what the lawyer had said.

"Poor mother," I muttered. "I'll surely have to take care of you."

Days and weeks of agony followed. Mother collapsed when she appreciated the extent of our poverty. That, added to her sorrow, was more than she could bear. Of course Harold, who was in his freshman year at college, had to find work. The house and all furnishings were sold, but even then there was scarcely enough to satisfy the creditors.

During all this time none of us had a word or thought of blame for dad, not even Harold. He had put everything into some venture which had turned out badly, and in which he had been practically robbed by others. That was all we ever knew; but we were sure that dad had loved us, and what he had done had been for us. He never cared to make money for himself. Always it was for us.

Finally it was all over. Mother was settled with a distant relative. Harold had secured a position in a printing office at a very small salary, but enough to take care of him, and I was on my way to New York. I felt that I could not go to work where everyone

knew me. But that in a strange place, among strangers, I would be spared the humiliations which would unavoidably be mine were I to remain at home.

The hours flew by as the train passed through towns and cities, then outlying suburbs until it came at last to the monster city—the Mecca of those in trouble and who wish to hide. I sat up the entire way. I dared not use the money a sleeper would have cost.

So I arrived in New York. A boarding house address—given me by a former maid of mother's—and twenty dollars in my pocket.

It was a beautiful day in late October when I stepped from the train and looked about me. I found an expressman, gave him my trunk checks, and after making inquiries took a car for the boarding house.

It was a dingy, smelly house in the west forties, but the landlady seemed a decent sort—after I had paid a week in advance for a small bedroom at the top of the house. A room poorer than any our maids ever occupied, but it was fairly clean, and I had made up my mind not to allow myself to be discouraged no matter what happened. I'd get work in a day or two. Until then I would get my breakfast in my room; my other meals wherever I happened to be.

So I planned with the optimism of youth and inexperience.

Industriously I studied the "Female Help Wanted" columns, not of one, but of all the daily papers. Im-

partially I answered all which seemed in the least promising. I walked miles and grudgingly spent car fare only to find either that I was too late or that because of my inexperience I wouldn't do. There seemed no chance for untrained femininity in all New York. I felt positive in my own mind that I could do what was required in some of the places I visited if only they would give me a chance.

"What has been your experience?" and "Have you any references?" were the two questions invariably asked, and to which I had to give a negative answer. Experience and references appeared to be absolutely necessary if I were to obtain a position. I had neither. But I had something else which in this trying time was a wonderful help to me. Along with dad's chin I had inherited something of his determination, his grit, his doggedness. I had promised my weeping mother to make a home for her. So I continued to buy the newspapers and study "Female Help Wanted."

It goes without saying that I had plenty of good clothes, too good, I found out later. I also had a little jewelry. Mother didn't believe in young girls wearing jewelry or dad would have given me more. I had, too, abounding health—rather a drawback, as it meant an abundant appetite.

"What shall I do?" I asked myself as from force of habit I sat on the edge of the bed and opened the paper I had just bought to the Help Wanted column.

"Wanted—a private secretary," stared at me from

the page. "Must be willing, neat, and obliging."

I surely was neat, the Lord knew I was willing, and as for being obliging, why, I certainly would do all I could. I would try my very best to please.

Once more I adventured forth. I had but a single dollar left. I smiled grimly as I remembered how often I had given that amount to a waiter for a tip. Now I didn't dare spend a quarter of it for a meal. I must find something to do at once or pawn the jewelry father had given me—my pearl necklace and a few rings.

I blushed and trembled at the thought. At twenty the thought of a visit to a pawnbroker—a first visit—is a fearsome thing.

I easily found the offices mentioned in the advertisement. They were on the eighteenth floor of one of the big downtown skyscrapers overlooking the bay.

CHAPTER III

I was not long kept waiting. A door marked "private" opened. A boy with shrewd, ferretlike eyes motioned me to enter. He then closed the door softly, remaining on the outside.

At first I was somewhat bewildered by the magnificence of the room in which I found myself. Most of the places at which I had applied had been rather dingy, or else rampantly flashy. In the centre of the room at a long glass covered mahogany table sat a man. A man who at once impressed one by his bigness.

"Well, my dear young lady, what can I do for you?" he finally asked, eyeing me keenly from under shaggy brows.

"I came in answer to your advertisement for a secretary."

"Um——" the big man grunted.

Gathering courage I hazarded:

"I hope that I am not too late; that the position is not already filled."

"No!" Then brusquely: "What are your qualifications? Where did you last work, and why did you leave? What references have you?" he demanded, eyeing my clothes this time instead of me.

"I have never worked anywhere. I have no references—except as to character," I faltered. "My old clergyman can assure you as to that."

"You wear pretty good clothes for a working girl," he took no pains to hide the sneer.

"They are all I have. Father died suddenly. There was nothing left, so I must find work," I stammered, ready to cry, yet determined I wouldn't.

Just then there flashed into my mind what Miss Pater said the day I left school, that day which seemed ages ago:

"If it is necessary to earn your living, I hope your wealth, your education, will not be a drawback."

My clothes, bought with a total disregard for cost, but all I had, were already proving a hindrance; my education, because it had not been practical, was seemingly of no help.

"Are you a good and fast typist? Can you read your own notes after you take them? The last girl I had couldn't if they had had time to get cold."

"Oh——" I fairly gasped. "I don't know shorthand. I write long hand unusually well. My teachers said so," I added, fearing he might think me conceited. "And I never have used a typewriter. I didn't suppose a private secretary needed to know those things," I desperately explained.

"You didn't? Well, they do, so you'll please not take any more of my time. Did you think I wanted an office ornament? Not that you would make a bad one," he leered. "Good afternoon."

I groped my way to the door and out of the building. I really had been optimistic about this position and the disappointment was great. Was it necessary for me to learn typewriting and shorthand to get a position? Surely there were other things by which I might earn a living. I had neither the time nor the money to devote to studying anything. I would waste no more time looking for office positions, or for a place in a private family. I had answered several advertisements for governess, social secretary, etc., but invariably the lack of references or my youth was the objection. I would now try the stores. Surely I could sell goods as well as some of the ignorant girls who often had waited upon me and annoyed me with their inefficiency.

So I commenced the round of the department stores. Fortunately they were all within walking radius of my boarding house, so saving carfare. After several rebuffs, some insulting remarks anent my not looking like a girl who wanted work, I at last found a position at the notion counter of one of the large stores at six dollars a week, just what I had paid my personal maid. But she had her living and most of her clothes, while I must make it do for all my needs, I thought bitterly.

"Be sure you are here on time," the stern-looking man who had hired me said as I left his office.

"Yes, sir," I answered as meekly as any east side girl could have answered. I must work, and if meekness would help, why I would be meek. But I would

not allow them to crush me. Six dollars would keep me alive until I found something better, I argued with myself, not realizing that the return I must give for that six dollars would leave me neither time nor strength for anything else.

I hurried back to my cheerless room, stopping to assure my landlady—to whom I owed two weeks room rent—that I had secured a position.

"How much will you get?" she asked with the landlady's nose for details.

"Only six dollars to commence with, but the promise of more later," I replied with far more confidence than I felt.

"It will take you a long time to catch up," she said slowly, then added in a peculiar tone, which brought the color to my face, "and it's the cheapest room I have."

My landlady's insinuation frightened me. "I'll get your money to-day," I assured her hastily. If she put me out where in the world could I go? There wasn't enough left of the dollar to move my trunks.

"You mean you'll pawn something?" she asked.

"Yes. I'll pawn a ring if you will tell me where to go."

"You go three blocks over and two down. You'll see a place where they are honest. Tell him I sent you. He'll do better by you perhaps. I send him lots of trade."

I hurried away, not cheered by the implication.

I walked rapidly, my cheeks burning like fire. I

went past the place, around, and then by again before I could summon up courage to go in. Then, when the man back of the counter found that I didn't want to buy, but had something on which I wished to raise money he sent me out into the street again, telling me to go to an entrance marked for such as me.

When I reached the street again my only desire was to run, to put as great a distance between myself and that shop as possible. But I forced myself to walk calmly around to the designated entrance.

I found myself in a small cubby hole sort of a place with a small table and a chair. When I had opened the door a bell had rung, and before I had time to wonder what it meant a man was asking what I wanted.

"I want to pawn this," I stammered, as I gave him the least prized of my possessions, though not the least valuable.

"How much do you want?"

"Oh, I don't know, all I can have."

"Tell me what you need and I will see if we can let you have it," he insisted, not unkindly.

"Can I have twenty-five dollars? My landlady, Mrs. Murphy, told me to tell you that she sent me," I added.

He left me alone a moment.

"Yes, I can let you have twenty-five," he said, as he gave me a yellow ticket and the money.

I almost ran back to the house. When I told Mrs. Murphy what I had got she sniffed:

"I guess you didn't ask for anywhere near what it was worth by what you say. But never mind, you'll know better next time," taking it for granted there would be a next time.

"Oh, I never shall go there again!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, yes you will! they all does," she said. "You take good care of that ticket, and pay the interest or they'll keep the ring."

"I'll remember," I replied as I counted out the six dollars I owed her. Then I wearily climbed the three long flights of stairs to freshen up a bit before going out to get something to eat.

I felt absolutely reckless. Didn't I have a job and money in my purse? So I placated the waiter by giving him twenty-five cents, and continued my day dreams. In return for his tip, a generous one for the place, he immediately brought me a queer little glass filled with toothpicks. I smiled and wondered what mother would say could she see the place I was dining in—alone, and how insulted she would be at the toothpicks.

I sometimes think that had it not been for a certain sense of humor I possessed I shouldn't have been able to endure those first few months in New York. But usually I could find something ludicrous even in the most stringent situation.

That night I slept soundly. I had cautioned Mrs. Murphy to wake me, and she had told me not to worry, she would get me up in time.

The next morning I was up and dressed when she

called. I was anxious, yet almost afraid to begin my work—that of selling notions. Suppose I shouldn't be able to please the manager? Suppose I was not adapted to the work? Suppose—my imagination conjured up every conceivable way in which I could fail.

I had been waiting several minutes when the employees' door opened. I waited until I saw a girl with a pleasant face looking at me, then asked:

"Will you please show me where to put my things? This is my first day."

"Come with me," she replied. I followed to the cloak room.

The girls at the counter were all young. Most of them looked pale, as though they were badly nourished. Yet almost without exception they had made a pitiful attempt, by the aid of cheap finery, to be in style. As I looked at their elaborately coiffured heads I wondered if they did not have to get up before daylight to have time to arrange them.

From the first I received only black looks from these girls. I tried to be agreeable, but even on this first day, long before the noon hour arrived, I could see that they resented my presence among them. Why, I could not understand. If I asked a question either I was not answered at all, or so curtly it was almost an insult and made my cheeks burn.

I have often since wondered if there is anything quite as cruel as youth.

I thought the noon hour never would come. I

was not accustomed to standing, and my feet ached and burned horribly. My head buzzed with the effort I had made to learn where the goods were, the prices and to wait upon customers.

In the middle of the morning a woman about thirty years old came up to me and said:

"You are the new girl?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Helen!" she called to one of the girls, "you show this girl—what's your name?" to me, "the stock."

"Sheila Andrews," I told her.

"Show Shella the stock," she repeated, mispronouncing my name, to my annoyance.

"Pipe the name!" I heard a slip of a girl whisper to another.

"Sure! it's in society we are now," was the answer, at which they both giggled.

The girl called "Helen" showed me where the articles I was to sell were kept. The eyes of the buyer were upon her and she didn't dare refuse. But she did it in such a way that I felt like giving up my position then and there. Why had these girls nearly all about my own age taken such a dislike to me? I had done nothing to warrant it.

When twelve o'clock came they trooped out in groups of two and three, either going to the room provided to eat their luncheons, or hurrying out into the street.

I wandered about forlornly for nearly the entire hour. I was not hungry and the fresh air felt good

on my hot cheeks, still burning from the treatment I had received. Then my common sense asserted itself and I rushed into the first eating place I passed, gulped a cup of coffee and ate a roll.

I worried along as best I could all the afternoon, and asked no more questions. One of the floor-walkers, a youngish man with a straight black pompadour and bright tan shoes, constantly passed the counter and stared at me. I supposed it was because I was new, and it was his business to keep watch of me. I tried not to appear conscious until I overheard the same girl who had made fun of my name say:

"His 'nibs' has got his eye on the new girl! just look at him."

I flushed and turning my back tried to appear not to notice. But I found that all the *savoir-faire*, all the sophistication acquired in fashionable schools and reception rooms didn't help very much.

I felt timid, afraid of making mistakes. I was pushed aside and flouted by girls whose ignorance of the things I knew was only less appalling than my incomprehension of them. But they knew their business; knew how to sell notions, and I didn't.

When I look back and visualize myself as I was those first few days I spent back of the notion counter I have to smile out of self-pity. Tired, feet blistered until I could scarcely walk, homesick, lonely, I wonder how I endured it. But fortunately at twenty we have a resiliency which enables us to endure what in later life would be impossible to us.

The covert taunts and sneers of the girls at the counter, their either ignoring me entirely or being impudent and insulting, were very hard to bear. But endure it I must or give up my position.

All this time I was ignorant as to the cause of their dislike.

As the days became shorter I had another untried experience to face. Never had I been out unchaperoned after dark, and the walk from the store to my rooming house became one full of terrors, some real, some imaginary.

If a man on the street corner spoke to me—often they did—I would tremble for ten minutes afterward. Sometimes I would lose control of myself and run from them. Once I was so frightened as a big brute of a man leered at me that I ran two blocks past the house before I realized where I was. But as time passed I became hardened to this, as I had to other things, and would look neither to the right nor the left, but keep quietly on my way. Such experiences made me feel cheap and common, as if I were in some way to blame.

Mine was, I now realize, the same old story of encouragement and despair. I was without friends or associates. I clung desperately to the ten dollars which was all I had left of the twenty-five dollars the pawnbroker had given me, and paid Mrs. Murphy three dollars of my salary and managed to live on the other three. Had I been obliged to pay carfare I could not have done it. There wouldn't have been enough left to satisfy my healthy appe-

tite even though I did buy only the plainest and cheapest food. It was often hard as it was, and many nights I went to bed hungry. I learned to wash my own underwear and then wear it unironed.

I had been in the store about two weeks. I had learned the stock, and my sales now compared very favorably with those of the girls longer employed. But their attitude toward me had not changed.

Then all suddenly one day I found out why I was so disliked, so ill-treated, when I had done nothing to warrant it.

It was my clothes.

After my experience in the office of the man who had advertised for a secretary, and who had spoken so insultingly to me because of my clothes, I had worn the very plainest, oldest things I had. Tired as I was, I had sat up late several nights and ripped off expensive trimming, and done all I could to make them inconspicuous. I had worn only dark dresses which mother had provided for morning street wear, but the cut and quality I could not change. And this it was which had excited the jealousy of the girls at the notion counter.

There was one other thing at which the girls at the counter had taken umbrage; silly as it seems. I had masses of heavy hair which had given me a great deal of trouble to dress. Now that I had to hurry in the morning, I brushed it simply back from my forehead, and coiled it low on my neck. My hair waved naturally, so was not unbecoming worn in this

simple fashion. I had not even thought that among the elaborately coiffured heads of the other girls mine was the more conspicuous because of its very simplicity until I heard one of the girls say:

"That new girl thinks she will attract attention if she combs her hair in that old-fashioned way! I'll bet it isn't all her own."

It may seem that I was weak and silly to allow such things to make me unhappy, but they did. I felt almost sick. Was even the way I did my hair, the simplest way possible, to militate against me? Then the reply from the girls she addressed enlightened me still further as to the cause of their dislike for me.

"Of course it ain't. Girls don't have that much hair no more. And her clothes! did you ever see such nerve? I suppose she thinks she fools us because she's selling notions same as us for six dollars a week. But she don't fool nobody but herself. No notion girl can wear such clothes unless she——"

Just then a customer came along and she stopped. But she had no need to finish. I knew what she was going to say.

With my search for work, long and soul-racking as it was, with my new knowledge of what it meant to a girl to be unprotected in a big city, had come a knowledge of what the girl meant when the nearness of a customer had halted her. So that was what they thought of me. Why? I certainly had given no reason.

Hot tears welled up into my eyes. I felt that I

must get away by myself somewhere or I should break down and cry before these girls, who no doubt would take delight in knowing they had hurt me. But just then the floorwalker, whose presence I had commenced to dread, came by and I forced back the tears.

"If you're sick, Miss Shella"—even he had caught that pronunciation from the girls—"I will get you excused for the day." Then leaning on the counter he said very low, "You know I'd do anything for you, don't you, my dear?" with a look that I suppose was intended to convey sympathy; but which also transmitted a something unexplainable, and which made me shiver.

At first I was tempted to thank him and go. I so longed to get away if only for a few moments. Then I hesitated. No, I would not put myself under obligations to him. I would stay.

Why should I, Sheila Andrews, my father's daughter, allow these foolish, ignorant girls to drive me away or to make me unhappy? It came over me with a rush that they were trying to force me out of my job. That their cruelty was the result of their ignorance I knew, but it made it no easier to bear. I must be patient, and not allow them to accomplish their purpose until I had found something else to do.

Mrs. Murphy, good old soul, encouraged me:

"Never mind, dearie! You'll git used to it by and by." And when I shook my head: "It's the standin' on your feet what tires you so. You best get some

flat-heeled shoes like mine," putting out a broad fat foot in a low-heeled shoe. "They'll be more comfortable than them high-heeled things you are wearin'." My shoes, like all my clothes, were of fashionable cut and make.

I took her advice and parted with three dollars and a half of my prized ten dollars for a pair of regular housemaid's shoes, but which—as soon as the newness wore off and I became accustomed to the low heels—gave me great relief. My feet did not burn and throb so at night, and the blisters soon yielded to treatment. If I had seen the least chance of getting anything else to do I should have given up my position. But whenever I contemplated such action I thought of the weary time when I haunted offices and intelligence bureaus, and hesitated. I was not quite foolish enough to think that because I had been a few weeks behind a notion counter in a department store it would be of any real help in getting something better.

You may wonder why I didn't pawn the rest of my jewelry. I didn't dare for one thing. I might get sick. Mother might fall ill and I would then have nothing on which I could raise money either for doctors or to go to her. Then there was another reason I hated to part with what I had. Dad had given it to me with such loving words, such a warmth of affection for "his girl," that I couldn't bear to part with it unless it were a matter of life or death.

I had learned a great deal since I became in reality a working girl. I had learned that one can live on

very little; that a bottle of milk and some crackers make a very good supper; that a cup of coffee made in your room with a penny roll and an egg is sufficient for breakfast; that for ten or fifteen cents a decent noon-day meal may be obtained at many big places scattered all over the shopping district. On what I used to pay for a box of bonbons I lived a week. Strange as it may seem, I remained well. Of course I was still mortally tired most of the time, in spite of the comfort the low-heeled shoes gave me; but I had not been ill, nor missed a day at my work.

I was still nervous and worried over the floor-walker's actions; but, as there was nothing I could do, I tried to appear indifferent, speaking to him only when it was absolutely necessary. But every time he came toward the counter I felt his bold eyes upon me and heard the suppressed giggles of the girls, who were not unobservant by any means.

"He'll git her some day or she'll lose her job," one of them said as I pretended not to hear when he spoke to me.

At first I did not catch her meaning. I thought she meant he would discharge me. But when it came to me that she had hinted at something entirely different such a nausea came over me I thought I should faint.

Then one day it happened.

CHAPTER IV

I had gone but a little ways toward home one night when someone touched my arm, and an oily voice I had learned to detest said:

"I'll walk home with you, Shella! and you're going to ask me in, ain't you?"

Forgetful of my need for work, my anxiety to keep my position, I told the obnoxious floorwalker my honest opinion of him. He stood as if petrified while I poured out the disgust and horror I felt for him and men of his kind. His face turned ghastly white with anger. He started to speak, but I forestalled him:

"Of course you will see that I am discharged," I stormed. "But I shall take good care that the manager knows your reason. Just because I am poor, because I work for a living is no reason for insult." I turned from him and ran up the street, not that I feared he would follow me, but that I wanted to put all the distance possible between us.

For several days nothing happened. He kept away from the counter as much as possible, and I began to think I had really frightened him by my threat; that he would not dare have me discharged for fear I would expose him.

Why is it, I wonder, that often just as we are feel-

ing a little content, just as we think the gods perhaps are becoming sorry for us and are going to be kind, that something unpleasant happens?

I had noticed a fat-faced man walking around the store and often had wondered what position he held. Now he seemed to spend most of his time pacing back and forth in front of the notion counter. Idly I wondered why, but as he never looked toward me, never spoke to anyone, my mild curiosity remained unsatisfied. But the whispering of the girls, their covert and malevolent glances soon convinced me that something was wrong! What, I had not the faintest idea.

But I was not to be left long in ignorance.

"You're wanted in the office, Miss Shella," the buyer told me. She had been the only person in the store who had given me a kind word, and I smiled at her as I asked the way.

"Perhaps I was going to be advanced, given a better position at another counter," I thought as I followed her directions. I knew that most girls were placed at the notion counter at first, and if their work warranted it, were changed. No thought of discharge came to me. I had done my work faithfully, never had been late, and my sales compared favorably with any girl's at the counter.

I had forgotten the jealousy of the girls; the enmity of the floorwalker—for the moment.

What was that stern looking man with the cold blue eyes saying to me? I wondered as I stood in the

centre of a big office on the second floor, I must listen. His voice sounded far away.

Then I heard.

"Small articles have been missing from the notion counter ever since you have been employed there. It has never happened before and the young ladies at the counter think it only fair to them that you go."

"Things—missing—and you—they think——" I stammered, still unable to think I had heard aright.

"Yes. We have watched and we have no proof that you have taken anything; but as the thefts began almost simultaneously with your advent into the store, the girls demand that you be dismissed and so relieve them of suspicion."

"But—why—I never touched a thing!" I declared in desperation, not at the thought of losing my job, but at the awful injustice of it, to go branded as a thief.

"Perhaps not, nevertheless I think it best you should go," and he laid an envelope with my pitiful six dollars in it before me.

"It's all a put-up job!" I cried, scarcely knowing what I said. "Those girls never liked me, and they have planned this so that you would send me away! I'll go gladly; I couldn't stay now—after this! But won't you please go or send to my room, search my things, and see that I haven't stolen anything? Don't send me away thinking me a thief!"

"We haven't time for that. If you haven't taken the things your conscience is clear and you have noth-

ing to get so excited about," and he turned his broad back on me and commenced to dictate to his stenographer, who had been an interested listener to his accusations.

There was nothing for me to do but go. Blindly I stumbled from that office, and found my way into the cloak room. As I passed out of the employees' entrance the floorwalker with his shiny tan shoes barred my way:

"I thought you wouldn't be discharged!" he sneered. "Next place you get you better treat them over you a little different than you did me." With a laugh he moved aside and let me pass.

I walked slowly home. I was not only out of a position; but I was branded as a thief. And all the time there pounded in my brain:

"Experiences and references—experiences—and references."

I climbed the steps of the rooming house, opened the door and stumbled wearily up to my room. I locked the door, then throwing off my coat and hat I stood long before the little glass atop of the old-fashioned bureau, and gazed at my mirrored face.

Did I look like a girl who would steal hairpins and sewing silks?

Self-pity mingled with the awful feeling of degradation. I threw myself on the bed and cried as I had not cried even when dear dad left us. I would not go back home where they all knew me and acknowledge myself a failure. I would not give up. Yet how

should I now approach my problems? Problems which had surely been difficult before. Would any one in the world believe me if I told him the story of my life in the store, just as I felt positive it was, but which I could not prove? I decided, no. I never would tell anyone I had worked in that department store, never mention it. I would start out again as I had in the beginning. Sans experience, sans references. I would find something. I had six dollars and a half left of the ring money and my six dollars from the store.

In a burst of rage I tore the envelope in which it had been given me into bits. I wanted nothing about to remind me that I had been called a thief. Then I bathed my eyes and went downstairs and located my landlady.

"Here's six dollars for my room for two weeks, Mrs. Murphy," I said, carefully giving her the identical bills I had received as my salary. "I have given up my place in the store. It was too hard and they paid too little. I am going to look for something better."

"But what did you give up your job for till you had got another, dearie?" she asked in the kindly tone she now used with me.

"I never could have gotten anything better while I had to work so hard. So I decided to try again."

"Have you got any more money, or did you give it all to me?" she asked, and I almost lost control of myself at the question.

"Enough to take care of myself until I find something," I returned. I had figured I could live for two weeks and I must get something by that time. Surely if I could live on three dollars a week while I was working, I could now when idle. I never took into account the carfare I should have to pay, the papers I would have to buy so that I might once more search the "Female Help Wanted" column.

The next week was but a repetition of the weeks before I went into the store. Only to all the weariness and discouragement was added the intolerable pain of that last and crowning insult. I now realize that it militated against me, that thought in my mind —that I had been branded. I felt myself cringe every time I was asked where I had worked before; and when I denied having ever been in a position I would flush and look conscious. Do as I would I could not appear natural.

My lack of references was the stumbling block over which I fell in every instance.

If girls of wealthy parents were not brought up in so unpractical a manner! I was supposed to be educated, accomplished, a finished product of society; yet I had not one single thing by which I could earn my living. I, in other words, had no specialty. If girls, even whose parents were possessed of unlimited means, girls who were finished at some fashionable school such as I attended, would only specialize upon some one thing they would often be able to save them-

selves at least the humiliations which I endured if it became necessary for them to work.

Finally I grew desperate. My money was gone. I had spent the last penny for a paper. I must visit the pawnbroker again. For no matter how discouraged, how unhappy I was, I had to live. And I had to make a home for mother. Had I not promised? That thought never left me. Harold was only just able to take care of himself. He could not help me; I would not think of asking him.

I knew he had not quite given up the thought of returning and finishing his college course. And it had been one of my rosiest dreams—at first—to assist him. Now I had realized that he must carve his own way unassisted; but I would not hamper him by asking for help.

This time before I started to dispose of another ring, so that I might live for a while longer, I asked Mrs. Murphy how much I should ask them to advance me on it.

"Do you know what it cost?" she asked.

"No! but father never bought a cheap thing for me," I replied.

"If you'll wait a bit I'll clean up and go with you to a friend of mine who will tell you what it is worth. He won't buy nothin' nor lend money on it; but he'll tell you what it's worth."

I thanked her most tearfully. I had learned to endure rebuffs of all kinds. But kindness had been a stranger to me for so long that it almost unnerved

me. Then, too, I felt sort of guilty. I had thought Mrs. Murphy hard-hearted, caring for nothing but what she got out of me.

We went out in a few minutes, Mrs. Murphy fearfully and wonderfully gotten up in her Sunday best. She took me to a tiny jewelry repair shop on Broadway, a mere slit in the wall, where a pleasant-faced Irishman, perched on a high stool, greeted us cordially, calling Mrs. Murphy by her first name.

"What can I do for you, Annie?" he asked. "It's good for sore eyes to see you."

"I came with this young lady. Mike, Miss Andrews." He acknowledged the introduction by an awkward bow. "She lives with me, and because her father was always rich and she never had to work, she's havin' a hard time of it. She wants to pawn a ring and we don't neither of us know how much to ask them sharks to lend on it. I told her you'd tell her honest."

"Thank you, Annie! I try to be honest with everyone," he replied modestly, as he took the ring and adjusted his jeweller's glass.

He examined it for a few moments, then said:

"I should ask for a hundred dollars. It is worth a great deal more, of course, and they may refuse to give you over seventy-five. But ask them for the hundred."

A hundred dollars! Why I could rent a typewriter, and get a cheap dress so that my clothes would not cause people to look at me with suspicion;

and yet have enough left to last until I found something to do.

Mrs. Murphy fairly beamed at her acquaintance.

"I told her you would tell her fair and square. She took one awful pretty one and they only give her twenty-five."

"If it was a good ring like this, Miss, you better take enough of what you git for this and take it out. Then before you put it in again bring it to me," he said kindly.

I promised to do so. This time, without hesitation, I went to the sign of the three balls. I now was familiar with the modus operandi and wasted no time because of foolish pride.

The pawnbroker quickly agreed to give me the hundred dollars I asked for, but looked rather surprised when I took out the other ring with a part of the money.

Really I felt quite the financier as I walked back to the rooming house. I had bought a paper, and now would not only study the "Help Wanted" column, but look for a place that rented typewriters. I could afford neither the time nor the money to go to a business college.

Before I went out I paid Mrs. Murphy, who had returned elated over her visit to her old friend, and its results, a full month's rent for my room.

"If the roomers was all like you, Miss Andrews, we landladies wouldn't have such a hard name," she said as I gave her the twelve dollars. "But most lodgers

pay everythin' else first and then the landlady can whistle for her money."

Then she recounted numberless anecdotes of how she had been "cheated" as she called it.

She told me of trunks left filled with magazines and newspapers owned by roomers she had trusted for weeks on the strength of such trunks. How others would sneak out in the night carrying all their belongings in a suit case when she had pressed them too hard for her money. How others gave her bad checks and in numberless other ways avoided paying. After listening to her stories I didn't wonder she had been afraid to trust me until I had proven my honesty. I didn't wonder either that she had become calloused to hard luck stories. What did surprise me was that she had still retained her kindly heart with it all.

But I realized that I had found a friend, humble though she was. This plain, uneducated Irish rooming-house keeper was the only real friend I had in all New York.

I first went to a department store—not the one where I had been employed, you may be sure—and bought a plain black serge tailor suit for which I paid twelve dollars. Then I bought a dollar waist. My hat would have to do. I dared spend no more money. It was old and weather-worn by this time so had lost most of its original style.

I went down town and found a typewriter renting agency. I hired a machine for three months for

three dollars; and they gave me a book of instructions. Then I went home and donned the coarse suit and cheap waist and once more went forth to find work.

As I turned into Broadway I saw just a little ahead of me a broad back which looked strangely familiar. I hurried a little, and just then the owner of the back stopped to look into a window in which was displayed a number of show girls' pictures. My heart almost stopped beating.

It was Bob Merrick.

I turned quickly and almost ran back the way I had come. I turned into a side street and reached the house by a circuitous route. For days afterward I didn't leave the house without furtively watching everyone I passed.

But this chance view of someone from home, one who had been intimately connected with that other life, which now seemed so far behind me that it was almost like a dream, had given me a shock. I found myself wondering if it would have been better if I had married Bob, and given mother the comforts and luxuries to which she always had been accustomed, instead of waiting until I could earn enough to give them to her.

That day which now seemed so far distant!

But, as always when I thought of marriage, an uncontrollable distaste would overcome me, followed by a thought of Clark Cummings, and a visualizing of his vibrant personality, and his serious face as he

told me of his love and his desire to make me his wife.

Was I never to forget this man? Was he always to be a hindrance to me, to my acceptance of the goods the gods were willing, yes, anxious to provide? At times I felt an impatience of myself that I could not forget him. At other times I hugged the thought in desperate fear that his image would be crowded out by my sordid living.

One day when I came in from my useless quest for work I noticed an unusual stir in the room next to me. It was larger than mine; but had been rented only transiently since I had lived there. Mrs. Murphy often complained to me that she couldn't rent it permanently.

"There's a nice young girl got that room next to you. It won't be so lonesome for you now. I sure hope she stays," Mrs. Murphy told me as I stopped to talk with her a moment on the stairs.

Naturally I was curious to see my new neighbor. The room being larger than mine was fifty cents more a week. But I knew she must be a working girl, as no other would live in a rooming house up three flights of dingy stairs.

I heard her moving around, and left my door open so that I could hear her if she went out. Then my loneliness, my longing for companionship urged me, and I crossed the hall and rapped at her door.

"I have the next room and heard you unpacking," I said by way of introduction. "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Sure!" she replied heartily, extending her hand. "My name's Jennie, Jennie Horton! What's yours?"

"Sheila Andrews."

"My, but that's a stylish name! I'll bet your mother found it in a novel," she exclaimed. "If I ever have a girl I'm going to name her Arabella. Don't you think that's a peach of a name?"

"It certainly is," I replied, laughing more heartily than I had done for weeks, "but I don't think mother took my name from a novel. I was named after a dear friend of hers."

"Well, it's some name! Sheila," she repeated it, "give a fellow a lift with this trunk! It's no beauty, but will just go in that closet where no one will see it. That's the reason I took this room. It was cheaper to pay for the closet than to buy a new trunk. I must have a swell looking room, you know. Mrs. Astorbilt might come to call, or some of my other tony friends."

I hadn't laughed as heartily since my arrival in New York as I did that afternoon while I helped Jennie Horton settle. She asked me no personal questions, but frankly told me all about herself.

"I came to this old town about three years ago. I got a job in one of them white palaces you see on every block. And, believe me, the people what go to them restaurants would eat the tables if the tops wasn't marble! I never saw folks try so hard to git their money's worth. And I want to tell you I nearly died the first few weeks, I was so tired all the time.

But I stuck. You've got to in this town. The pay wasn't much, but I used to josh the Johnnies and be nice to the old ladies; and to the women with babies; I got lots of extra nickels and dimes. I couldn't have lived if I hadn't. It pays to be nice to folks. Most people like you to be real friendly like. Why, some of them girls went 'round with their noses in the air just as if they was Mr. Rockefeller's nieces instead of just waiting in a restaurant. They done as little as they possibly could to get their pay; only being decent to some dressed-up bloke who didn't have more'n fifty cents in his pants, and lettin' the old ladies and the women with heavy babies in their arms wait until they got through joshing before they got waited on. Their noses are still in the air—if they are there yet—but I make them step around lively. I'm one of the head waitresses now, and startin' at the bottom I know just what's needed, you see. I ain't no millionairess yet, but I get along."

"And you became a head waitress in three years?" I gasped, really surprised that a girl with her very evident lack of education could so quickly raise herself to a position of trust.

"Yes; just three years. But I worked terrible hard and did my best to please the customers and the bosses both. It's hard work to play 'em right sometimes; but I managed."

CHAPTER V

Confidence begets confidence, and even though I never had been thrown with a girl of the type who talked so freely of herself, I told her of my wonderful home, my darling father and my beautiful mother; of Harold and the old servants who had been with us for years. Of the fashionable school I had attended, but which had not educated me to earn my living; of dad's death and my struggle to find a position. I told her all save the department store episode. That was locked in my own breast. Not to this girl could I confess that I had been thought a thief.

"You sure were up against it mighty hard after being brung up like that," she said, when I finished, her eyes full of tears. "Livin' like this must be awful! It was different with me. I was always used to hustlin'. We never had nothin' at home. My dad was no good. He wasn't like your dad. I wish't he had been. Ma, she done what she could. But if I hadn't hustled something to eat myself many's the time I'd gone hungry. But you! Gee! Why, I just don't see how you stand it. I seen you was a lady as soon as you come in."

"I'm a girl just like you, Jennie! and so lonely." My whole soul was sick for companionship.

"Well, you won't have no reason to complain of being lonesome while little Jennie lives next door! Now let's go out somewhere and eat. I could swallow a horse and wagon, to say nothin' of chasin' the driver! Then when we come back we can git acquainted."

"I feel as if I knew you now," I smiled as I went for my hat and coat, happier than I had been in many days.

"My, but you're that stylish," she commented as I joined her.

"I had these things, Jennie. I couldn't afford to buy more suitable clothing, so I have to wear them."

"You ain't doin' no kickin' because you have to wear them duds, are you?" she queried, wide-eyed.

When I told her what a drawback they had been to me she opened her eyes still wider. Then carelessly pinned on her plain little sailor and said:

"Them folks what can't tell you're the real thing, no matter what you wears, ain't got much sense."

In some way the ungrammatical little speech comforted me because it went straight to my heart.

Oh, how I enjoyed that dinner, the first that I had not eaten alone for weeks and weeks. No fashionable course dinner ever had tasted one-half so good. I can't remember what we ate, we talked so fast. Long before we had finished I realized that I at last had a friend, and that Jennie Horton's unpolished exterior hid a heart too big for her slight body.

When I spoke of how frail she looked she said:

"You keep thin in them white palaces! You walk so much. Think what all them society ladies do to get the fat off them! If they'd come down and let me boss them round for a week or two they wouldn't have to do much bantin' or go without good things to eat."

"You might propose it to them," I laughed.

"You see I read all about it in the Sunday papers! I tell you them papers come pretty near knowin' all about everybody, don't they?"

When the check was laid on the table Jennie insisted upon paying it.

"Didn't I invite you?" she asked, when I objected. "Now that we know each other, we'll go Dutch, but this is on me."

I saw that further objection would hurt her feelings, so I let her pay the check; a good-sized one, too. "I will make it up to her in some way," I thought, as we passed out of the restaurant, and I noted the cheap quality of her clothes.

When we reached the top of the stairs I asked her to come into my room.

"That's so; I almost forgot my manners," she laughed. "I must return your call, Miss Andrews. It ain't recherche not to." Her pronunciation of the word was indescribable.

As she stepped into my room the first thing that caught her attention was the typewriter.

"You've worked in an office?" she asked.

"No; I'm only trying to teach myself to do typing so that I can get a position," I answered.

"Learnin' yourself?" Jennie gasped. "I wonder if I could do it, too?"

"You're welcome to try; we might be able to help each other."

Jennie was delighted with my offer, and at once accepted it.

"When you get tired I'll come in and bang them keys a while," she remarked. "It would be too bad to have the only music box in the house quiet because nobody could play it. Have you learned to write with it yet?"

"A little. But, Jennie, I can't wait to perfect myself. I must get something to do right away."

I told her about pawning my ring, and that I had used up most of the money, so must find something, no matter what, at once.

"I don't believe you could stand it, but"—she hesitated—"how'd you like me for a boss?"

"You mean," I asked, hardly daring to believe that at last I was to have something to do without meeting with insult or embarrassing questions to get it.

"Yes, I think I can get you in. One of my best girls went home sick to-day. But it's awful hard work at first."

"I don't mind how hard it is because you'd be there," I said, already leaning on Jennie.

"You bet your bottom dollar I will."

So it was decided that I should go with her in the

morning and she would introduce me to the manager.

I lay awake for hours that night, smiling in the darkness as I recalled some quaint speech of my new friend, wondering what mother or Bob Merrick would say if they saw her—then as always thinking that if Clark knew he would understand.

He would appreciate my loneliness, the loneliness he had so vividly described as being greater than any other loneliness—that of a great city. He would know and understand the longing for companionship, which made me eagerly grasp at the offer of friendship, even from a girl like Jennie Horton. If her heart was all right, he would not cavil because of her lack of education, or her ungrammatical language.

The next morning Jennie chatted blithely all the way to the restaurant. She introduced me to the manager, and in reply to his questions as to references she told him:

"She's an old friend of mine, Mr. Arnold. You can be sure she's all right or I wouldn't bring her along with me." So without any embarrassing questions I was taken on trial.

"You do not look very strong," Mr. Arnold said kindly, "and the work is hard."

"Oh, I'm stronger than I look," I hastened to assure him as we left the office.

This restaurant was not entirely strange to me, as often while looking for work I had stopped there for a cup of coffee or a sandwich. I was so grateful to

Jennie for sparing me when with the manager—she had also told him we lived in the same house—that I yielded to a sudden impulse and kissed her.

"Oh!" she gasped, her big eyes filling. "You mustn't do that. You'll make a softy of me." And she laughed awkwardly as she wiped her eyes.

I don't wonder that I kissed the dear girl. She was the only person who had shown me the least bit of happiness since I had left my old home, the only person of my own age who had treated me as if I, too, were a girl, and human.

"That was easy!" she exclaimed after a moment. "Now come along with me. I'll keep an eye on you to-day. And don't forget what I told you about the old ladies, and the women with babies. And I don't mean just on account of the tips, either. I mean because they blow about a place where they get some attention, and that's good for trade."

This wise little Solomon, who never had learned her three R's, spoke a truth—I have since learned—that many a big business manager would do well to heed.

My first morning at the restaurant passed quickly. I had time at noon for my luncheon and a few moments' rest. Jennie came and complimented me on the way I had taken hold of the work.

"You'll do all right, just give you time," she said, as we sat side by side eating. "But I sort of think you'd do all right anywhere if you got half a show!"

"But, Jennie, that's just the trouble," I answered,

and some of the bitterness I felt crept into my voice. "They won't give me a show."

"That's because they don't know the real thing when they see it. Now I'd a known right off the reel that you was all right! I ain't got much use fer men's judgment anyway. I know two or three girls that they took on here what I could have told wasn't any good; but just because they was pretty doll babies they got a job. We used to have a manager here what would fall for a pretty face every time, but Mr. Arnold is different. He's all right."

I thought so, too, and readily agreed with her. I had not forgotten how kindly he had spoken to me.

As the days passed I found that I was happier, more contented than I had been since I left home. Of course I got very tired, and oftentimes my spirit would almost fail me. Jennie was a constant source of wonder and merriment to me, though often I had to curb her when she wanted to do certain things when I was with her. In her hearty, clean-minded way she could see no harm in speaking to a man without the formality of an introduction or in accepting invitations from patrons of the restaurant. I pleaded and argued with her, but it did no good.

"A girl's got to have a little fun," was her invariable answer. "I can't invite any Reginald Van Dusen sort of guy to come here and call, can I? And if a fellow what seems all right asks me to go to the movies or to Coney Island, why I'm goin'. I ain't passin' up any good times. I work too hard."

"But, Jennie, you may get into trouble going out with strangers, men of whom you know absolutely nothing." My conventional chaperoned bringing up was shocked at her ideas.

"What if I don't know nothin' about them? Trust little Jennie to take care of herself. If any guy gets fresh with me he'll soon get his. I know some girls couldn't do what I do; but I'm one that can. I only wish you'd go along sometimes, Sheila, it would do you good. I feel just awful when I think of you settin' up here and never havin' any fun."

"I'll go with you some time, Jennie," I told her. "We'll go on a real spree, just you and I. But I can't go when you have any men along."

So after this I would occasionally go to the movies with Jennie or sit in the gallery to see some play. Once in a while we would go to a Sunday night concert. But they bored Jennie, so usually I went alone or not at all.

I had given Jennie several articles of clothing, for which she was foolishly grateful. It seemed absurd, after all she had done for me, for her to make such a fuss over what I could do in return. To me it seemed so inadequate.

"I never thought I'd have a hat like this," she said, looking in the glass and preening herself. It was a gay little hat mother had bought just before dad left us and one I never had worn. I thought it too extreme for me now, but I knew Jennie could wear it with impunity. It was very becoming to her, and

she was inordinately proud of it and of her appearance.

It may seem strange that an article of apparel which would have caused adverse comment had I worn it could be worn by a girl like Jennie. But with her it would simply mean the ordinary shop girl's love of finery. With me, it seemed to presuppose something different.

I found my new position anything but a sinecure, even with all that Jennie did to make it easier. My arms would ache so at night from carrying the heavy trays that I scarcely could lift them, and my feet again became so sore from walking on the polished floor that it was only by giving them the greatest care that I was able to wear my shoes, though I still adhered to the clumsy, flat-heeled variety.

My first unpleasant experience in the restaurant happened about this time. I was waiting upon a rather flashily dressed young man when he made a remark to me I did not like. I pretended not to notice and went quietly on supplying his wants, although my face burned like fire.

He repeated the remark, following it with an invitation to meet him outside. For a moment I lost my temper and answered as I would before I was dependent on keeping a job to live. Just as he made a sneering reply I noticed Mr. Arnold standing near.

"What did he say to you?" he asked, nodding toward the fellow.

"I can't repeat what he said, Mr. Arnold," I replied, sure I was going to be discharged.

"You mean that he said something unfit for you to repeat?" he asked.

Mutely I nodded. Already I saw myself walking the streets once more looking for work.

Motioning to the door man, a burly fellow whom Jennie called a "bouncer," he said something to him, what, I couldn't hear. But to my surprise the man to whom he had motioned grabbed the fellow whose insulting remarks had so annoyed me by the collar of his coat, and walked him, resisting at every step, toward the door. He then flung him out with the remark:

"Don't you come in here again; we don't allow your kind here," and the incident was over.

I found myself trembling with excitement and relief. Mr. Arnold noticed and came over to me.

"Go into the rest room a while, Miss Andrews," he said. "I'm sorry you should have had such an unpleasant experience, but such things are sometimes unavoidable in a public place."

So instead of being discharged I was being sent to rest. Never again would I believe that people were bad and cruel until it had been proved to me. I had been ready to think Mr. Arnold would send me away, and he had been my friend. That night, when I told Jennie all about it, she remarked drily:

"Didn't I tell you Arnold was all to the merry? Don't make no mistake about him. He ain't going to

see any of us girls insulted by a guy like that. But, honest, Sheila, you can't blame 'em so much when they sees a girl like you slinging dishes in a joint where anybody what has a nickel can go."

"I was so afraid I was going to be discharged," I confided.

"Not while I'm boss of the girls. I didn't tell you yet, but last night I was made the real head waitress."

Jennie surveyed me proudly to see how I would take the news.

"Really, Jennie, I am so glad!" I exclaimed. "It will mean more pay, won't it?"

"Sure it will, and more say-so, too. I'll have the best bunch of girls by the time I get them weeded out in all New York."

"You mean that now you will hire and discharge the girls?" I asked, astonished at the confidence reposed in my little friend, so ignorant in many ways.

"Yes, me and Arnold," she replied soberly, and when I laughed, she was inclined to be hurt, until I explained that I had not meant anything derogatory.

As I became accustomed to the weight of the trays, and the ache in my arms grew less, I again commenced practising on the typewriter. Jennie had nearly caught up with me, and it was she who conceived the idea of dictating to each other. So every night, at least every night when Jennie was at home, we spent a couple of hours in study. First I would dictate to Jennie for an hour. Then it would be my turn at the machine. Really it was astonishing how

fast we progressed. It was getting cooler now, and Jennie was not so anxious to go to Coney Island and other places after we left the restaurant. Then, too, I had promised her that I would teach her to spell and "talk correct," as she expressed it. It was a big job to undertake, and at times I almost despaired. But Jennie was so grateful, so anxious to learn, that I couldn't give up.

Harold, my young brother, seldom wrote me, so I was surprised when I received several closely written pages from him. He had left the position he had secured immediately after father's death, and was now in a newspaper office at quite an increase in salary. He wrote that he would be able to send mother a little every month, so that I wouldn't feel obliged to unless I was, as he expressed it, "flush."

I smiled as I thought how far I was from being "flush." And I wondered what Harold would think and say if he knew the struggle I had had to even live.

He wrote that he liked newspaper work and was going to try to learn the game. It really cheered me immensely to receive such a bright letter from him. I sat right down and told him so. I also told him I was doing better, and whenever I could afford it I would send mother some money. It was not fair that he should do it all.

I realized that there wasn't much chance for me to advance where I was. I wasn't made of the stuff that could handle a lot of girls of the type employed

in a cheap restaurant. It takes the Jennies of the world to do that. So now I scarcely went out at all, save to go back and forth to my work. I even studied all day Sunday, to Jennie's disgust.

"It's like a sheet of paper you're getting," she complained. "You'll blow away some day, and I'll have all the cops a-hunting you."

I laughed, then complimented Jennie. She was learning to use her G's. At times I had despaired that she ever would. It had been "goin'" and "huntin'" so long that to her a G was a useless letter.

Jennie came in one Saturday, a broad smile on her pretty face.

"See what I got, Sheila. Others besides you think I can't talk," and she laid a book down beside me. I stopped my typing to look at it. "Ten Thousand Words Often Mispronounced," was the title. I tried not to laugh, but it was no use, and I finally laughed heartily, Jennie good-naturedly joining me.

"The poor boob! Giving me a thing like that. Just as if I can't mispronounce enough of 'em without a book learning me to."

I had another good laugh and then tried to explain to Jennie how the book might be of help to her. But she pretended to be very dense, and replied:

"You can learn me better'n any book."

I had long ago given up trying to make Jennie say "teach." There were some words she couldn't seem to grasp; that was one of them.

After Mr. Arnold's kindness to me I was so grate-

ful that I often went out of my way to say "Good morning" or "Good night" to him. I looked upon him simply as my employer. He was about forty years old and a very serious sort of a man. Not at all the kind to put a girl on her guard. So I was surprised when he said:

"I shall be obliged to go into the country to-morrow, Miss Andrews. Wouldn't you like to go? I have a very comfortable car."

"Oh! I'd be delighted if Jennie can go, too," I responded. I knew how Jennie enjoyed a motor ride and how few she had had. As for myself, the very thought of the country made me sick with longing.

CHAPTER VI

The next day, Sunday, Mr. Arnold called for us about ten o'clock. He had a touring car, and Jennie and I sat in the tonneau. It was a beautiful day and the exhilarating ride through the country rested and refreshed me. Jennie was very amusing, calling our attention to everything along the road, making quaint remarks, and showing her naivete in many ways.

"It's a automobile for mine as soon as I get the dough," she declared, and when I frowned and said, "Oh, Jennie!" she laughed heartily as she explained to Mr. Arnold: "Sheila's trying to learn me to be a lady like her—to talk like one, I mean. But she's got a tough job. Don't you think so?"

"Not if you really try to do as Miss Andrews tells you," he replied rather pompously. "You're really bright enough, Jennie, to do almost anything you set out to."

"Well, listen to that! I guess now it is up to me to make good."

We both laughed, not at, but with her, and no more was said on the subject.

Mr. Arnold was to visit several farms and see about food for the restaurant—eggs and chickens and vegetables. It was really very great fun to listen to the

talk, sitting comfortably back in the car. I noticed that he usually got what he wanted at the price he was willing to pay, and spoke to him about it.

"Nonsense!" he said, though he flushed and looked pleased. He had a way of dismissing things with "Nonsense!"

Then he said, so low that Jennie, who was busily talking to a farmer's daughter, couldn't hear:

"I had hoped we might be alone to-day. I had something I wanted to say to you," and he smiled slowly at me.

I turned fiery red, not so much from modesty as because I did not want him to say anything more.

"I want to take care of you," he blundered on, one eye on Jennie.

On the way back he proposed that I ride in front with him; and as Jennie also insisted it wasn't fair for him to ride alone all the way home, I did as he asked rather than make talk about it.

"No one else has annoyed you in the resturant, have they?" he asked, apropos of nothing.

"No, everyone has been most respectful," I answered.

Then I told him how much I appreciated what he had done for me; and again tried to thank him.

"I suppose you've done things like that for many other girls," I said, "girls like me."

"I try to help the girls all I can," he replied, "but there are none like you."

I felt horribly embarrassed. It may have been

that some of my reflections were mirrored in my face; for all suddenly he faced me and asked me what I was thinking about?

"Oh, nothing," I returned. "That is, nothing much."

I felt uncomfortable, almost like crying. I feared I must lose a friend if he insisted upon playing the part of a lover.

"May I take you out some night soon—to dinner—or something? I have something to say to you as I told you before."

"Oh, I never go out; that is, never with anyone but Jennie," I exclaimed.

We were going along a very smooth, level road, and not a thing was in sight. He leaned toward me and took one of my hands in his.

"Oh, be careful!" I cried, "we might have an accident!"

"Who said accident?" Jennie drowsily inquired. "I was sound asleep back here."

But she didn't go to sleep again, and the danger was over for the moment. But I felt it was only postponed. Mr. Arnold wasn't a man to give up anything he undertook so easily.

When he left us at the house he said, as he bade me good night:

"Make up your mind what night you'll go to dinner and tell me in the morning."

What should I do? I would put him off as long as I could, I decided; but I should have to find another

place if he insisted upon making love to me. It would be unbearable for us both. Jennie saw how matters were shaping themselves, and remarked inelegantly:

"Arnold's got a crush on you, all right. He ain't a bad sort, Sheila, either. You might go further and do a lot worse! Though, of course, he ain't your kind, really."

"Isn't, Jennie," I corrected, more to stop her talking of Mr. Arnold than that I cared.

"Well isn't, then. It does sound a lot better, don't it? But you see I get to talking anything I think of, then I forget to talk right."

"But, Jennie, I notice that you talk very well when you are giving orders at the restaurant."

"I expect that's because I'm boss, and must make the girls understand that I am."

I had succeeded in taking Jennie's mind from my affairs, and pleading letters to write I shut myself in my room.

It was getting late afternoon, but I did not light the one gas jet, which was all the illumination my room boasted. I sat by the window and thought of mother, of dad, and of Clark Cummings. Always in the stress of any worry he was in my mind. I knew I was destined always to think of him. I whispered it to myself and flushed hotly in the dark at the confidence.

Then my thoughts reverted to Mr. Arnold. I liked him; he had been very kind to me. But rather than marry a man I didn't or couldn't love I would

have died of starvation. I would have slept homeless in the streets or walked miles if need be in search of work. Yet an appalling sense of loneliness swept over me. If only someone who loved and cared for me were near. Then again I felt Clark's nearness. And for an hour I sat there plunged in a deep, entrancing dream. There was an ecstatic pain in my heart, and even as the tears fell unheeded from my eyes something within me sang a song of happiness.

The next day was dull and sodden. There was a pall-like fog over the entire city. I urged myself through the masses of humanity all on the way to earn their bread. Was life worth the unending struggle? I took off my rubbers and hung up my wet coat, then turned to confront Mr. Arnold.

"I'm afraid you got wet coming down in the rain," he said without preamble.

"Just a little," I answered hurriedly, then turned to leave him.

"Just a minute, Miss Andrews, Sheila," and he laid a detaining hand on my arm.

"Yes," I said, and stood shivering with apprehension.

"Will you go somewhere with me to luncheon?"

"Yes, if you wish," I answered, desperate. It had to come. I had to go through with it. So the sooner it was over the better.

"At 1 o'clock, then," he said, and turned to his duties, leaving me free to attend to mine.

All the morning I worked mechanically. I knew

it was my last day. And while I had studied hard and intended to better myself as soon as possible, I was not yet ready to again throw myself out of employment.

"Are you sick, Sheila?" Jennie asked as she passed me. "If you are Arnold will let you go home." And she winked at me.

"No, I'm not sick, Jennie." I pretended not to notice the wink. "It's the weather, I guess."

I would go to luncheon with Mr. Arnold, then I would give up my position and go home. I felt I could not stay no matter what he said. I would have to find some other place. There are times in every one's life when they have been scourged and whipped by the position in which they found themselves. I felt like that as I put on my things at 1 o'clock to go to luncheon with my manager.

We went to a very quiet, exclusive place. The kind of a place I, as Sheila Andrews, would have chosen, but to which I long had been a stranger. He found a table shielded by a giant palm, and gave the order.

I never could remember a single thing I ate. I only knew and always remembered that he asked me to marry him, to let him take care of me. And the hurt look in his eyes when I refused.

"You will stay with us just the same, Sheila?" he asked.

I shook my head. I couldn't speak. I wanted so desperately to cry.

I did not return to the restaurant. When he found

I was firm in my determination to leave he said he would explain to Jennie that I had resigned, and she would get another girl in my place.

All that week I tramped the streets of New York answering advertisements for typists. I saw with dread that most of the advertisements called for stenographers and typewriters. Would I also have to learn stenography before I could get a position? The idea staggered me.

I loathe the thought of those nightmare days and weeks which followed my leaving the restaurant. Jennie exhausted her persuasions, but I would not go back.

It seemed to me that every girl in New York answered each advertisement that I did. I stood in line outside of offices and shops. I stood or sat in outer offices only to be told that my lack of experience barred me, and that a restaurant reference was worthless.

I knew in those days what it meant to be chaffed, insulted, pitied. I was told that no girl as good looking as I was needed to work, and that no girl who dressed as I did had to work; that it was a blind. I've had men say things to me that I resented and then laugh because of my indignation. But I also met with some kind words—some encouragement of this kind:

"When you have a little experience come and see me again," or "If you perfect yourself in shorthand try us then." But such men were few and far be-

tween, and they only were kind—so Jennie said—"to let me down easy."

Then at night to wearily climb those three long flights of stairs and crawl into bed, too tired to practice on my typewriter; too tired to talk to Jennie.

Two weeks passed and I had found no work. And I had scarcely touched the keys to my machine so worn out was I with my fruitless wanderings.

Finally, Jennie secured me a place again as waitress in another restaurant. It was farther away, and the pay no more. I had to rise earlier so that I might get there in time; and was, of course, later in getting home. I never rode unless it was stormy. Street cars were a luxury in which I could not indulge.

I had been at work about a week in my new place, which really was one of the chain of restaurants to which the larger one managed by Mr. Arnold belonged, when one noon, feeling sick, tired of my life, I wandered over on Fifth avenue.

To this day I never have been able to explain why I did such a thing. For months I had carefully avoided the streets—as far as possible—where the people I knew might walk when in the metropolis. I had on the oldest, simplest dress I had and a plain little hat. I had almost forgotten that once I had seen Bob Merrick, and for some time had neglected to wear a veil.

Right in front of the public library I saw him again, and this time I was unfortunate. He also saw

me. He rushed up to me and held out his hand and said something to me, but I did not answer him. Presently he took my arm.

"I must talk with you, Sheila. Come, we'll go to some quiet place and lunch together."

Without a word, scarcely realizing what I was doing, so anxious was I to get away, I jerked loose from him and darted into the crowd. Then a car passed me on Forty-second street and I jumped on. I could have shouted for joy when I realized that I had evaded Bob. I looked cautiously from the car window and saw him standing on the corner looking up and down the street, a scowl on his handsome face.

All the afternoon I thought of the meeting and of my escape. I would never go out again without a veil, and I would forever keep away from Fifth avenue. I knew now, even more surely than before, that I never could have anything to do with the people I had known in Chicago when dad was alive. The contrast in my position then and now was too great. I was a poor working girl, and as such had nothing to do with them, or that part of my life which seemed to be ages and ages behind me. The only real life was this awful, sordid one I now lived.

I told Jennie all about meeting Bob Merrick. I felt I must talk of it with some one, and I knew Jennie would never repeat anything I told her.

"I should have to leave here if he found me, Jennie," I said.

"But why, Sheila? I don't seem to understand—quite. You said he had asked you to marry him many times, and that he was your kind, in your set. Why don't you marry him? You wouldn't have poor Arnold, and he's gone around with a face that would curdle the pancake batter ever since. But I can't see what you've got against this one."

"Don't you see, Jennie, I refused him when I had everything. I couldn't marry him now just because I'm poor and need his money."

"I'll bet a nickel you're in love with some one else, some one you ain't never told me about," she said shrewdly.

Love some one else! I knew I was destined to love Clark Cummings as long as I lived. And I knew, too, that my love for him would effectually prevent my giving myself to anyone else.

Jennie was so sympathetic, so sweet, that I just laid my head on her shoulder and had a good cry. She petted and comforted me as if I were a little child, and soon I felt better.

"That's right, Sheila! A little cry don't hurt nobody! Now go to bed. He'll most likely go back west to-morrow and you'll never see him again unless you want to."

I went to bed, but I didn't share Jennie's optimism.

For a day or two I watched anxiously every man I saw. But I wore a heavy veil, and when the third

day passed and I saw nothing of Bob I once more breathed freely.

Jennie was not with me as much as before. Of course, I did not see her during the day as I did when we worked in the same restaurant, and at night she was often out. She was engaged to a young man in a haberdasher's near the restaurant, and they were to be married as soon as they saved enough to furnish a home.

"I shall go right on working," Jennie had said when she showed me her ring. "A girl never knows how a man's going to turn out. And I ain't taking any chances. Jim's all to the good as far as I know. But ma used to say that no woman don't know a man till she's lived with him. I sorter guess ma's right."

Jennie had introduced me to James Watson, and he impressed me as a good, hard-working fellow, just the right kind for pleasure-loving Jennie.

Now again my life seemed to run along in a ceaseless grind just to exist. I became depressed, moody, and terribly unhappy. I sent mother every cent I could spare, but I could see no chance to keep my promise to make a home for her. I could scarcely take care of myself. I wondered what I should do when my clothes wore out and I would have to replace them. So far I had spent scarcely anything for clothing. A pair of shoes, the cheap, black suit, and a veil had been the extent of my purchases.

Finally I became desperate. I asked for a day off and spent it going from one office to another. I of-

fered to work for very little until I proved my worth, only to be told that I wasn't worth anything if I wasn't expert. Then, when it was almost dark, I decided to try one more place. I applied to Hunt & Hunt, stock brokers. They had advertised that they wanted a girl at once.

To my surprise, they said they would give me a trial. That is, their manager, Avery Rogers, said so. I was to report for duty the next morning. I had named eight dollars as the salary I wished at first. I had been getting only six dollars at the restaurant, but I should have to take the subway twice a day; so I would have but little more at the end of the week.

I found the doors locked when I arrived at the office where I was to work. A scrubwoman was the only person I saw, and without waiting to be questioned she said:

"They don't git down here very early, Miss. I take it you are a new one."

"Yes, I start to work to-day," I told her.

"Well, all I got to say is don't take no nonsense from 'em. You look like a decent sort of a girl; see that you kape so."

"I'll try to," I answered, smiling at her. She had a good-natured Irish face; one to be trusted. "When do they open?" I asked.

"Nine o'clock or a bit after. There ain't no need a gettin' down before."

That would be nice, I thought. I could practise

on my typewriter an hour before I left the house. Already my new position took on an added attraction.

It was about ten minutes after nine when a dark-haired boy, his cap on the back of his head, opened the door. I followed him in and explained that I was the new typist.

Before I had my things off, however, Mr. Rogers, the man who had engaged me, came in. Then the rest of the office force. By nine-thirty they were all busy; and I sat idly waiting for one of the firm—the one whose work I was to do—to come in.

When he came I was astonished that he was so young a man. I had yet to learn that most brokers are young men, that the life is too nervous, too exciting, for men to grow old in it. He called me into his office at once, and laid some letters on my desk. "I wish those addresses copied," he said shortly, "and some envelopes addressed. We are sending out a lot of circulars."

Just then the clock struck ten, and my existence was forgotten for the time being.

CHAPTER VII

About eleven o'clock the noise in the outer office quieted down a little. The board boy's voice calling the stock quotations came more intermittently, and without so much animation. I had long ago finished the simple task Mr. Hunt had given me, and sat idly waiting for some one to tell me what to do.

It was quarter past the hour when Mr. Hunt came in and immediately came over to me.

"Finished?" he asked laconically.

"Long ago," I answered.

"I understand you can't take dictation," he continued, a frown of annoyance on his face.

"No, but I intend to learn," I responded.

"Um—well, Miss Cantor will take my letters."

Then he touched a bell and the dark-haired office boy appeared. "Joe, bring a pile of those circulars to Miss Andrews," he said.

Joe left the room and in a minute returned with a big bundle. He laid it beside me. Mr. Hunt took a book from his desk and gave it to me.

"Please fold the circulars and address them to the names you will find in this book."

He had said "please" and spoken pleasantly to me. I was in a large, quiet, rather handsomely furnished

office, overlooking the bay. I glanced out of the window and thought that I should never tire of the ever-changing panorama. Then I went to work.

While I had no "speed" as yet, I typed neatly. And I watched the pile of addressed envelopes grow with pride. I worked steadily until twelve o'clock. Then I commenced to fold the circulars and enclose them in the envelopes. At half past twelve Joe came in and remarked in an off-hand way:

"Mr. Hunt told me to tell you you could go to lunch."

"Thank you, Joe," I smiled. I had risen so early to see the restaurant manager that I felt faint. Then, too, I did not know the locality, and would have to look for a place to eat.

Mr. Hunt was just going out with another, an older man, as I came in. I knew at once he must be the other member of the firm from the strong resemblance between the two.

They both raised their hats as they passed me. When I told Jennie of it, I added that I nearly fainted. Such courtesies are not extended to waitresses in cheap restaurants.

I hurried in to my desk, a happiness over my work glowing within me. I would try so hard to please. Every minute out of the office I would spend in study. Briskly I set to work folding circulars until I heard a voice say:

"So you're the new girl. Big job you've got folding those things and licking stamps!"

I glanced up, flushing at the tone more than the words. A slight, rather insipidly pretty girl stood at my elbow looking down at me, a half sneer on her face.

Up to this I had not thought of my work as at all beneath me. I had only been grateful and happy that I had secured it. I felt hurt, and for a moment didn't reply. Then I got a grip on myself and said pleasantly:

"Perhaps I sha'n't do this always."

Then I remembered what Mr. Hunt had said about his letters and asked: "Are you Miss Cantor?"

"Yes. How'd you know my name?"

"I heard Mr. Hunt say Miss Cantor would take his letters."

"Can't you take dictation?" she queried.

"No—I am going to learn," I volunteered.

"Got the job on your looks, eh? Well, it's an easy place if the boss likes you. The hours are short. But I'll give you a tip. Don't let Rogers get down on you. So long as you don't take my job I'd just as soon tell you things. First I thought you were going to. You never can tell when they're going to turn you off for some other girl."

She finished rather bitterly I thought.

"Surely they wouldn't do that here. Mr. Hunt seems very kind," I replied, as I again turned to my work, a little of my enthusiasm gone.

What Miss Cantor had said about Mr. Rogers made no impression on me at all. If I had given it

any thought it would have been simply to wonder just why he should have any reason to "get down on me," as she expressed it. I was not working for him, but for Mr. Hunt.

But what she had said about my position did rankle. The folding of circulars and addressing of envelopes evidently was not a position which required very much ability; and was consequently looked down upon by the regular stenographers.

I told Jennie what Miss Cantor had said after I reached home that night; and Jennie characteristically returned:

"She's most likely jealous of you. Is she good looking?"

"No, not very," I replied.

"That's it, then, and I'll bet she'd give anything to have you out of the office. You're too good looking to be much of a pet with other help. You sure are if there are any unmarried men around. Is your boss, that Mr. Hunt, married?"

"I'm sure I don't know! but what difference does it make whether he is married or not?" I asked. "I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Most of the time it don't make a mite of difference to the men whether they're married or not. They'll flirt with a pretty girl. But it makes a lot of difference with the girl if she's the right sort. If a man's single she hasn't no feeling about going out with him if he asks her and—oh, letting him buy her a box of candy once in a while, or something like

that," and she laughed merrily, then finished more soberly: "I'll bet a nickel that Mr. Hunt of yours, the young one, isn't married; and that Cantor girl is setting her cap for him!"

"Oh, Jennie," I replied, laughing at her peculiar ideas, "girls who work are too busy to think of such things. You only say them because you like me, and resent anything anyone does to me."

"I like you all right! but you'll see I'm telling you straight. I've worked all my life; and most of us look out for the main chance."

"I do wish I knew shorthand," I grumbled. "If I did I could get much higher wages. They pay Miss Cantor fifteen dollars, and I only get eight. But I guess she's been there a long time by the way she talks."

Up to this time I had forgotten all about Mr. Rogers, now what Miss Cantor had said came into my mind, and I told Jennie.

"I knew there was a stone somewhere in that cherry pie," she said. "He'll be making love to you and if you get cross and high and mighty with him you'll be fired. They won't tell you why, but you'll go just the same."

I couldn't help but laugh at Jennie's pessimistic talk. I knew there were fine and good business men, just as I had begun to realize that there were some of the other sort. But I believed the fine characters predominated, and I hated to listen to her disparaging remarks.

Jennie and her fiance were very kind to me; and often urged me to go out with them.

"Work all day, then all the evening too, is hard for a girl," James Watson said in his bluff, hearty way. "Better go to the movies with us once in a while, it will do you good."

"Oh, Sheila thinks we want to make love and that she will be in the way!" Jennie broke in before I could answer.

"Miss Andrews knows I love you, Jennie, else I wouldn't want to marry you. I ain't ashamed to have her know it either."

I admired his honest way of talking and told him so. In his way he was as fine as many an educated man; because he was a real gentleman. I never heard him use a coarse word, or say anything to offend the most fastidious taste. And though he was almost as uneducated as Jennie he used better language. I suppose the people with whom he daily talked over the counter influenced his speech, while Jennie dealt almost entirely with girls of the uneducated class like herself.

Yet of all the people I have met, Jennie has always been dearest to me. She was a friend when I most needed friends.

I had not been working for Hunt & Hunt very long before I mistrusted that the younger member of the firm, the one with whom I worked, tried to make work for me, that really I was not needed in the office, that handicapped as I was because I knew nothing

of shorthand, and could not take dictation, I was of little or no use.

The knowledge was humiliating. I think I must have shown in some way the struggle going on in my mind—I had determined to tell Mr. Hunt how I felt —because he said to me one afternoon:

"Miss Andrews, will you tell me something of yourself? Don't think I am asking from ordinary curiosity. Tell me, please, why you are here, doing this?" and he pointed to a pile of circulars I had just finished folding. "You are educated, refined. I do not understand."

"I am glad you have asked me, Mr. Hunt, I was going to tell you this afternoon that I would go."

"Go! Why do you want to go?"

"Because I know I am worth nothing to you, that I am not earning even the eight dollars a week you pay me."

"Are you willing to tell me of yourself?" he asked again, paying no attention to my remark. "Tell me everything,—everything you can. I want to know."

For the first time since dad died I talked frankly with a man. I told him of my early life, of my useless education, of my home and social standing. Of mother and dad, and dad's passing. Of the loss of all I had been accustomed to, and my pride that would not let me remain in Chicago, of my long hunt for work in New York, of the way I haunted offices and stores, of the insults and the kindnesses shown me, of my work in the restaurants, and then at last

how I had found him. I told him all save the department-store experience.

He sort of smiled when I finished and remarked dryly:

"I imagined your story was something like you have told me, Miss Andrews. No one could meet you and not know you weren't accustomed to this kind of life. Now I meant what I said, I want to help you. But how?" and he sat with knitted brows for a few moments.

I did not interrupt his thinking; I had nothing more to say. Finally he raised his eyes and said, looking directly at me:

"Will you accept a loan from me, Miss Andrews, and use it to fit yourself for a better position—with us I mean?" he added as I looked inquiringly at him.

"Thank you, Mr. Hunt, but I have made a vow never to borrow money, nor to accept help from any one. But I shall not forget your kindness," I assured him, my lip trembling.

I never wanted to cry so badly in all my life. I could endure anything but kindness, it seemed—that made a baby of me.

"But, Miss Andrews! it would only be a loan."

I shook my head.

"Then will you do this? Stop work at three o'clock. Find some one to teach you shorthand. Wait a minute"—as I was about to interrupt, "you can. There are numbers of places where they will trust you if they know you are to remain with us

when you have perfected yourself. In fact, I myself know of one good school which frequently helps girls in that way. You can continue your present work while you are learning—at your present salary. I supposed you received a much larger one—Rogers attends to all the details of that kind. I suppose he thought he was saving the firm money," he added with a queer, twisted smile.

"If you think I can do enough to earn what you pay me, and you will give me the address of the school, I will gladly accept your offer," I said, my eyes filling.

He wrote the address on one of his cards and gave it to me. Then left the room without another word. I learned long afterward that he went directly to the telephone and made the way easy for me by telling the head of the school that he would vouch for my tuition.

There *are* good men in the world.

When I told Jennie she was agape with wonder.

"He sure is a peach!" she enthused, "but I'm afraid you ain't strong enough to stand it to work so hard. I guess Jim and me'll have to get married sooner than we was going to," she added rather sheepishly, "so you can have a decent place to live."

"You mean that you would take me to live with you, Jennie?" I asked, wonderingly.

"Why not? Ain't your money just as good for me as it is for Mrs. Murphy?" she asked gruffly.

That was Jennie all over. She never let any one think she was doing a kind act.

Now a new, hard life commenced for me. I strained every nerve to learn shorthand in the least possible time. I had two motives. One to justify Mr. Hunt's faith in me; the other to better myself so that I could do more for mother.

I wrote her a long, cheerful letter telling her that I really had hopes of soon earning enough to have her with me. Lately that had been in my mind all the time. If only I could earn enough to have two or three small rooms and have mother keep house for me, I felt it would be like heaven. I had eaten in cheap restaurants and cooked over a gas jet until I felt that home-cooked meals were one of the greatest luxuries in the world.

Perhaps I did wrong to encourage mother as I did that the time was near when she could come with me. But I felt that I would be forgiven even if I aroused false hopes if it helped her out of the depressed state of which Harold had spoken so anxiously.

Miss Cantor learned of my going to the school through the office boy. He had overheard something Mr. Hunt said to me about it and immediately her manner changed toward me. Up to this she had been either carelessly kind or indifferent. Now she was actively unkind, slighting me, or making it appear that I was of no use in the office whenever she could. She never did these things when Mr. Hunt

was around, but she seemed to take a fiendish delight in doing it before Mr. Rogers. I often caught them whispering and glancing in my direction. I knew they were talking about me. It embarrassed and annoyed me. This would not have happened had my work kept me in Mr. Hunt's private office as it had at first. But now I was sent anywhere, to do anything necessary—that I was capable of doing.

The office was an extremely busy one at this time. Stocks and securities of all kinds were climbing skyward because of the European war, and everybody about the place was nervous and excited.

Mr. Hunt assured me it wouldn't be long before I should be capable of being his private stenographer.

I worked doubly hard after he told me that. I begrudged the time I spent eating and sleeping. I worked feverishly; always with that idea before me. After my experiences as a working girl the safety and seclusion of a private office appealed strongly to me. I commenced, too, to read the financial news. To post myself on securities, their values, and daily fluctuations. If I were to hold a position of trust I must familiarize myself with the business of the firm. So now I was too interested, too busy to be unhappy.

When Mr. Hunt observed me looking at a financial paper he asked me some questions. I was sure he was surprised at my answer. He showed it in his face. After that he would occasionally give me something to read; usually something connected with se-

curities in which the firm was particularly interested.

Several times when I was on my way to the little restaurant where I lunched I would run into Mr. Rogers. Seemingly by accident. One day he stopped me and asked me to lunch with him.

"I will take you where you can get a good luncheon," he said with what he meant to be an ingratiating smile, but which put me on my guard.

"Thank you, Mr. Rogers, I never lunch with any one," I returned.

"I wonder if you'd have the same answer for Hunt?" he sneered, then turned and walked the other way.

I felt very uncomfortable for days whenever I thought of that speech. I should have given Mr. Hunt the same answer, I knew. But I couldn't help understanding the implication. Gradually it slipped from my mind. Principally because I never again met Mr. Rogers in the vicinity of the cheap restaurant where I lunched.

Things went on in the same way for about three months longer, then one day I told Mr. Hunt that I had finished the school.

"Very well," he said quietly, showing no surprise, although I thought he looked pleased. "When you come in the morning your new position is open to you. I shall pay you fifteen dollars, more if you are worth it."

"But, Mr. Hunt"—I hesitated, hardly knowing how to go on—"won't that put Miss Cantor out?

You won't need two of us, and I shouldn't like——"

"Your kind feeling toward Miss Cantor is very commendable, Miss Andrews," he said dryly. "But Miss Cantor never was my private stenographer. She is my brother's. I asked him to spare her to me because——" now it was his turn to hesitate—"until you were capable of doing my work."

"Oh, I am so glad!" I exclaimed. "I should hate to think that my good fortune had caused any one trouble."

"You consider it good fortune, then?" he queried. "I am called a hard taskmaster."

I laughed from pure joy.

"I am not afraid!" I told him, already planning how much I could save to pay for my tuition and still give mother something. I figured that I would live on six dollars as I had been doing; give mother four dollars, and have five dollars a week to pay the school. Then I remembered that I would have carfare, and other things perhaps, so I would keep seven dollars for myself and send mother three dollars.

That night when I went home and told Jennie of my good fortune both she and James Watson insisted that I go to dinner and the movies with them to celebrate. I saw I should hurt their feelings if I refused.

James took us to a nice, clean, medium-priced restaurant, and ordered a good dinner. Then we went to the nearest moving-picture theater. Carfare, you see, counted for him, and there were three of us.

The pictures were very good. I was soon enjoying myself thoroughly. I was young, healthy, and that night very happy. About nine o'clock a man pressed by us to a seat further along in the same row. Something familiar about him attracted me, and I looked up into his face. It was Mr. Rogers. I bowed slightly, and he deliberately turned and examined both Jennie and James Watson, who, because Jennie had insisted, was between us. A disdainful smile curled his lips as he took his seat, and Jennie saw and understood.

"Who's your friend?" she whispered, loud enough for him to hear.

"Sh—h," I returned, frowning at her.

"He don't care for your company much," she retorted, this time with deliberate intention to have him hear, "but we don't like him either, so we're quits."

"Who are you talking about?" James, who had not noticed, asked.

"Oh, a guy who thinks he's something that he ain't," she returned.

By this time I was terribly embarrassed. Jennie saw it and was at once penitent. She took my hand and held it in both of hers as she whispered:

"I'm sorry, Sheila! I didn't know he was anything to you."

CHAPTER VIII

I MADE no reply to Jennie's remark about Mr. Rogers being something to me. I feared she would say something more to embarrass me. But the rest of the evening I was tortured by the constant regard of the office manager. Never have I left a place so gladly as I did that show.

After James had bade her good-night in the rooming-house parlor—Mrs. Murphy would allow no callers in the rooms—Jennie came in and, sitting on the edge of my bed, said:

"Who was he, Sheila? Honest I am sorry."

"Never mind, Jennie. He wasn't, what you think, anything to me. It was Mr. Rogers, the manager of the office. The one I told you about."

"Him!" and the disdain she put in her voice was inimitable. "If I had known it was him I'd said more'n I did."

"I'm glad you didn't know," was all I said, but I thought that she had said quite enough.

The next day I was very busy. But about noon Mr. Rogers came in.

"Will you go to lunch with me to-day?" he asked without preamble.

"No, thank you," I said. "I told you, Mr. Rogers, that I never accepted invitations for luncheon."

"But you do for the movies," he sneered, "and with mighty queer-looking people. Too bad I'm not good enough for you after that cheap-looking fellow you were with last night."

I lost my temper. Had I been older, more accustomed to this sort of men, perhaps I might have managed the situation more tactfully. I might even have explained to him who my companions were. But something seemed to break in me and I blurted out:

"You are not fit to black that fellow's shoes. He, at least, is a gentleman!"

I was trembling so I could scarcely stand. No sooner had the words left my lips than I realized how foolish I had been. Mr. Hunt had told me that Rogers attended to all the details of the office; the hiring and discharging of the clerks, etc. Now he would probably discharge me.

Mr. Rogers stood for a moment too amazed at what I had said to reply. I could see that; though he frightened me. Then he said, his voice husky with anger:

"You are discharged, Miss Andrews. We shall not need your services any longer."

"What are you discharging Miss Andrews for?" Mr. Hunt asked. We both started, neither of us had heard him come in.

"Because she was impudent, insulting, and—is in-

competent," he returned quickly enough, though I noticed he had turned white.

"I am the best judge of Miss Andrews's ability," Mr. Hunt replied sternly. "As to the other charges, I shall have to hear her version. Please understand, Mr. Rogers, that I will attend to the hiring or discharging of my private stenographers hereafter."

When the door had closed on Rogers, Mr. Hunt turned to me.

"Now," he questioned kindly, "what's it all about?"

"I have a dear girl friend. She lives in the same house with me," I commenced. "She helped me when I most needed a friend. She is the restaurant girl I told you of. She is engaged to a young man, a man like herself, honest all the way through, but a clerk in a cheap little store. I told them of my good fortune last night—that you were going to let me be your stenographer at a good salary. They insisted I must go to dinner and the movies with them to celebrate. I consented rather than to hurt their feelings. At the movies Mr. Rogers sat in the same row. He insulted my friends by his disdainful looks; then Jennie—she has a very quick, sharp tongue—said something he overheard. To-day he came in and asked me to lunch with him as soon as you left the room. When I refused he said it was too bad *he* wasn't good enough for me after the cheap fellow I was with last night. I lost my temper and told him he wasn't fit to black James Watson's shoes; that James was a gentleman."

Mr. Hunt had not interrupted me by a word. Now he simply said:

"Will you and your friends have dinner with me to-morrow night?"

"But, Mr. Hunt! I never accept invitations of any kind."

"Do this to please me," he returned. "Rogers is a valuable man. I don't want to lose him, and I must teach him a lesson."

"Very well—we'll go."

I knew I was safe in making an engagement for both Jennie and James Watson. Either of them would do almost anything I asked them.

When I told Jennie of the invitation her eyes grew big with delight; and when she found that James was included she was happy, indeed.

"He is sure some fine man!" she exclaimed, "but what made him do it, Sheila?"

I told her enough to satisfy her without letting her see that Mr. Hunt in some way was trying to make up to me for what had happened and prevent its occurring again.

He kept me until all the rest had gone, ostensibly because he had letters he wished to get off. But I knew it had something to do with his plan; about which I was becoming very curious.

Finally he arose.

"Come, Miss Andrews, we must not keep your friends waiting."

I had told them to be down a little after six o'clock.

James and Jennie were waiting, dressed in their Sunday best, and fairly beaming. I presented them to Mr. Hunt. Jennie's hearty:

"How do you do, I'm glad to meet you!" seemed to please Mr. Hunt, who assured her the pleasure was mutual. James rather bashfully shook the hand my employer extended, but attempted no remarks.

"We are going to dine in Brooklyn," volunteered Mr. Hunt.

I had never been to Brooklyn, and wondered why he was taking us over there, though at the same time rather pleased at the idea.

When we left the subway we walked a few blocks and entered a restaurant.

After we sat down and he had ordered, I noticed Mr. Hunt constantly looked toward the door. He had given a swift glance around the room before we were seated. I couldn't help but think he was looking for and expecting some one.

Presently I saw a grim look of pleasure and relief cross his face as the head waiter piloted a man to a small table very near us. To my astonishment, it was Mr. Rogers. He saw us and bowed, his face almost grotesque in its amazed expression. Mr. Hunt motioned him. When he reached the table, Mr. Hunt said:

"You know Miss Andrews, Mr. Rogers. But Miss Horton, may I present Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Watson, Mr. Rogers."

I almost felt sorry for the manager, so embarrassed

was he. He bowed, mumbled something, and then excused himself.

"I only have a few minutes to-night and dropped in here for a sandwich."

"Do not let us detain you," Mr. Hunt said quietly. "I simply wanted you to meet my friends, and heard you say you were coming here to-night."

"Did you get on to that—*his friends!*" Jennie whispered as Rogers turned away, his face flaming.

I said nothing, but looked at Mr. Hunt and caught the twinkle in his eye. So this had been his way of showing his manager that my friends, however lowly, could not be insulted, nor liberties taken with me because of them.

I couldn't help smiling back at him, showing that I understood. Rogers only remained a few minutes, and after he left we had the nicest time imaginable. Mr. Hunt drew Jennie out; and she talked freely and cleverly in her inimitable way. James seemed to overcome his bashfulness in part and when, at nine o'clock, Mr. Hunt left us in the subway we all voted it a splendid evening.

It was a bit theatrical; but it certainly had been an original idea.

The next day Mr. Hunt said:

"I don't think you'll have any more trouble with Rogers, Miss Andrews. If you should, come at once to me."

The stern look on his face boded no good to the manager should he again offend.

"It was a very cleverly managed affair," I couldn't help saying, at which we both laughed heartily. Nothing more was ever said about it, although Mr. Hunt frequently asked me about Jennie, who had interested him.

Now my work went easily, smoothly. I had tried to be friendly with Miss Cantor after I learned to take dictation, but she had scorned me and had evidently told others of the office force her version of the story, so putting me in an undeserved position in their eyes. Frankly, I was glad of it in a way. Of course no one likes to be slighted, yet it left me free to come and go in my own way.

I was astonished one day to have Mr. Hunt remark:

"Are you fond of music, Miss Andrews?"

"Very," I replied.

"I have some tickets for the opera to-night. I find I cannot go. Will you take your friend Jennie and use them? The opera is 'Aida,' I believe."

"Oh, I should love to go!" I exclaimed. "So would Jennie. I don't believe she ever heard an opera."

"You have?" and he smiled.

"Oh, yes! I know them all by heart!" I smiled back.

I could scarcely wait to get home with my precious opera tickets. They seemed like a bit of my old life come back again. Jennie was almost as pleased as I, although she had no idea what grand opera was like.

We hurried through our dinner so we would have plenty of time to dress. I wanted to be early, very early. It was the beginning of the opera season, and I knew the costumes would be wonderful. I found myself suddenly longing to see women in beautiful gowns, men in evening clothes.

Just as we were about to leave the house James Watson called to see Jennie. He was delighted that I had asked Jennie to go, and insisted upon seeing us safely to the door of the Metropolitan Opera House. He promised to be there to take us home.

Our seats were in the eighth row in the orchestra. Almost in the center of the house. They were wonderful seats, for they commanded a full view of the horseshoe on both sides. Jennie was enraptured; and as the people came in her remarks were really refreshing. We were so early that, until some people came and sat directly back of us, I did not attempt to stop her. But when the curtain went up on the lovely old opera I whispered to her not to talk any more.

To my delight Caruso sang that night; and never had he been in better voice. I forgot all the months of hardship and worry as I listened, and was wafted back to the time when dad, mother and I would sit together in a box listening to the same wonderful music.

During intermission it was impossible to keep Jennie still; not so much because she was interested in the music, but because of the gay gowning, and

the great number of people all "dressed to kill," as she expressed it.

It was very late when the opera was over, and I was glad to have Jim there to take us home.

"How did you like it, Jennie?" he asked as we walked along.

"Oh, Jim! You should have seen them ladies without any clothes hardly, and all covered with diamonds! I never saw so many lovely dresses in my life. And all the men, Jim! You just ought to have seen them open-faced coats they was wearin'! The whole place was full of them. Every blessed one acted as if he owned the place and everyone looked like a waiter."

"But the music! Did you like that, Jennie?"

"I guess the music was too grand for me, Jim! I liked the girls when they danced and lots of things; but you remember you took me to see 'Chin-Chin,' that time we had them dollar seats. That was some show! I guess Sheila liked this one all right; she wouldn't let me even whisper. Me for a place where I can talk!" Jennie said as I hurried upstairs so that Jim might bid her good night without being embarrassed by my presence.

It was almost morning when I finally dropped off to sleep. I was so excited over the unusual treat that I couldn't rest. Little strains of the opera kept running through my mind, and once or twice I found myself humming them.

I didn't get a chance to tell Mr. Hunt how much I

had enjoyed the opera until after lunch. We were awfully busy that morning; the market had slumped badly for no particular reason that anyone knew and the customers were a little nervous and kept him busy.

But about half past three he came in.

"You're tired," I said as I waited for the letters he always dictated about this time.

"Very. It's been a hard day."

"I want to tell you how much I enjoyed the opera," I returned. "I was so excited I scarcely slept at all. Caruso was wonderful!"

"I shall be afraid to give you tickets even when I cannot use them if it will keep you awake. But, tell me, how did your friend, Miss Horton, enjoy it?"

I laughed.

"Jennie told James Watson—he came for us—that it was all right enough, but for a real treat she preferred 'Chin-Chin.'"

"I can readily understand that," he replied, "and many more highly cultivated people than Miss Jennie have the same taste. Grand opera really only appeals to music lovers, though many others go because they think it is the thing to do. I often go in the upper balcony simply to watch the people. There you find real devotees of music. Clothes, style are nothing to them. And they are so quiet. In the boxes and on the floor the whispering often ruins the performance. But up there near the roof they come to hear, not to talk."

About five o'clock he suddenly stopped dictating.

"The rest can wait until morning. I am going home. You, too, look tired, and you said you had no sleep. I wish you would let me take you home in my car."

He had asked me once before and I had refused.

"No, thank you, Mr. Hunt," I said again. "The subway will get me home just as quickly."

"But not so comfortably," he replied, but I said no more save to wish him good night.

I wished devoutly before I reached home that afternoon that I had accepted Kenneth Hunt's invitation to ride home in his car. When I emerged from the subway it was still light and I wore no veil. Suddenly someone came up hastily behind me, then I heard:

"I knew I could not be mistaken!" It was Bob Merrick. He took my arm and held it closely. "If you try you can't run away from me this time," he said half laughing, half angry. "That was a shabby trick you played me the other time, Sheila! I hunted for you for days afterward."

"I know it was, Bob, but just then I didn't want to see anyone from home," I returned.

"And are you glad to see me now, Sheila?" he asked in the old ingratiating way I remembered so well.

"Why, yes, Bob!" and I meant it. I was a different girl as far as my inward feelings went since I had worked for Kenneth Hunt. My self-respect was restored. I was still a working girl; still poor, and

lived in a miserable rooming house; but I was doing good work, and I knew it. My employer respected me. I once more felt I could hold up my head.

"Where do you live? I'll walk home with you, wait while you dress, and then we'll go to some nice restaurant for supper."

I started to refuse. Then I thought: What's the use? I might as well go out to dinner with Bob. He'd give me no peace unless I did. But could I bear the mortification of having him see where and how I lived? That also I would endure. I was sending mother a little regularly; I was gradually wiping out my debt at the shorthand school. I would not let false pride interfere with an evening's enjoyment. Then, too, almost unconsciously I felt a longing for a little of the old life, the good food, the gayety of the kind of a place to which I knew Bob Merrick would take me.

So I made no excuses, but when we reached the house ushered the fastidious Bob Merrick into the dingy boarding-house parlor and went up to dress.

"I'm going out with a man from home, Jennie," I called. "Do come and help me dress."

"All right! What you going to wear?" she asked as she came into my room, "That dress you wore to the opera?"

"No, Jennie! I am really going to dress up. Will you open my trunk and take the lower till out. There is a pale blue and silver dress in that. I'll wear it—get the slippers and stockings too."

I never had seen Jennie so excited. She fairly danced when she saw that dress. And the shoes and stockings she insisted upon putting on for me.

In about half an hour I was all dressed and ready. I confess that I was filled with a pleasurable pride as I looked at myself in the little mirror screwed on the wall above the washstand.

"You are just as lovely as them ladies in the opera!" Jennie told me. "If you only had some of the jewels they wore."

Her remark made me think of my pearl necklace, which I kept locked in a little box in the bottom of my trunk. I took the box out and fastened the pearls around my neck, tender thoughts of dad running through my mind as I did so.

"Oh, Sheila, you are too lovely! I do wish Jim could see you!"

"My, but you look stunning!" Bob said as I reentered the parlor where he looked as much out of place as it is possible to imagine. I had to smile at the immaculate Bob, sitting gingerly on the edge of one of Mrs. Murphy's faded chairs, looking at a crayon of the departed Mr. Murphy and a glass covered bunch of flowers clinging to a decrepit cross. It was really ludicrous.

He called a cab and we rode up Fifth Avenue, which blazed with lights and was filled with people on foot and in cabs.

We stopped on a side street just off the avenue, the entrance to one of the oldest and most exclusive

eating places in New York. Bob helped me out, and then carelessly told the cab to wait. I remembered it was an old trick of Bob's, and that I often used to laugh at his extravagance.

Now I felt it was no laughing matter. It would cost him as much to have that taxi wait as I earned in several days of hard work. I couldn't control the impulse to tell him to pay the man and let him go.

"All right, Sheila, anything to please you," and Bob paid the man, tipping him liberally.

CHAPTER IX

Bob ordered a delicious dinner, all the things I liked and which for so long had not eaten. He insisted upon ordering a bottle of wine, although I told him I didn't touch it. But he was so happy, so like a great, big, overgrown boy, I let him do as he pleased.

It was good to hear of all the old crowd, of Harold, whom he told me he often saw, the girls I used to chum with, and all the gossip a girl loves. It was after ten o'clock when Bob took me home. He was to be in New York a day or two and I promised to go to the theatre with him the next night.

When I said good morning to Mr. Hunt he answered me more shortly than I had ever heard him speak, even to the office boy. He couldn't be well, I thought, and paid no attention, but went at once to my desk and commenced to lay out the unfinished work of the night before.

As I moved over to my employer's desk, pad and pencil in hand, waiting for him to begin dictating the letters, he said so coldly I looked up in surprise:

"I thought you never went out anywhere?"

"Why—what do you mean?" I asked, so startled by his manner that for a moment I couldn't collect my thoughts.

"Just what I say. You told me you never accepted invitations to dine; yet last night I saw you dining with a very good-looking young fellow, dressed as you no doubt like to be dressed. I must admit you looked very lovely."

He finished in a tone that was almost an insult, yet which held something which sounded like a hurt.

"Oh, Mr. Hunt! did you see us? That was Bob Merrick, a boy I have known ever since I was a tiny bit of a girl. I met him on my way home, and he seemed so glad to see me, was so insistent upon giving me a good time that I couldn't refuse to go with him."

His face lightened as he said:

"But the clothes. You were in full evening dress; I couldn't help but notice, slippers, stockings, and all. You see I am very observing."

I laughed. I couldn't help it.

"I fished those clothes out of the bottom of my trunk while poor Bob sat on the edge of one of Mrs. Murphy's awful chairs and waited for me. It was the same costume I wore to a party with him over a year ago—before dad died."

I don't know what made me explain myself so carefully to this man, what I had done, and all about it, save that he had been so kind to me that I couldn't bear the thought of his misunderstanding me. I had refused to go out with him alone. He had asked me

just once and when I stated my determination he never again had made the same request. I had refused to ride in his car; and yet he saw me with a fine-looking, well-groomed man, and dressed as he never had seen me. I felt I owed it to him, as well as myself, to explain.

The look of relief which swept over his face was so keen it startled me again. Why should he care so much that I had gone out; and then why should he be so relieved when he found out the true inwardness of my action?

But while the thought crossed my mind, his face again changed, and he said moodily:

"And this young man; is he—anything to you?"

Before I answered Clark Cummings's face came between me and the man questioning me. I looked directly into Kenneth Hunt's eyes as I told him:

"Nothing but a good friend and an old playmate. I am going to the theatre with him to-night. He goes back home to-morrow."

"Thank you, Miss Andrews, for being so frank with me. I realize I have no right to question you; but—well—believe me, it was purely because of the interest I have in you, and in your future."

This man, who had given me back my faith in men, especially employers, held out his hand and asked me to always trust him as a friend.

I quickly gave him the promise. Then we went prosaically to work as if nothing had happened.

All day Mr. Hunt was very gracious, very thought-

ful of me, but he did not mention our talk of the morning, or refer to it in any way until just as he was leaving the office. Then he came over to my desk and said in just his old manner:

"I hope you will have a pleasant evening, Miss Andrews," and smiled genially at me.

I hadn't felt so absolutely happy and contented in weeks. I had enjoyed myself thoroughly the night before. My explanation had made Mr. Hunt realize that I wished to do nothing which I had to hide, and I was going out to a play. He told me to go when I had finished a certain amount of work, but I stayed on working upon other things until I had to hurry to get dressed before Bob came for me. I couldn't ask the poor fellow to endure another half hour looking at the late Mr. Murphy.

I wore my gray dress.

"I always liked that dress, Sheila," Bob remarked. "It someway looks like you."

So he remembered. In a way I was glad because it paved the way for an answer to his next question:

"Why do you do it?"

"Do what?" I countered.

"Stay here, wear clothes you've had for ages? and——"

"Live in a cheap rooming house?" I finished for him. "Poor Bob! How I pitied you sitting down in that awful parlor last night."

"But, Sheila, why do you live like that? Marry me, dear, and let me take care of you."

As always Clark Cummings came before my vision.

"Now, Bob, if you are going to commence that, I shall be sorry I said I'd come out with you. Just be a good pal, Bob. I'm a working girl now. It has done me good to see you; don't spoil it."

"You don't pretend that you like it—this kind of a life, do you, Sheila?"

"Yes, now, honestly I do! I didn't at first, when my work was harder and my surroundings almost unbearable. But now I work in a nicely furnished office. And my employer is a gentleman."

"If you earn fifteen dollars a week can't you get out of that hole you live in?" he asked.

"No! because I send mother something each week, and have a debt to pay."

"A debt! If you had to borrow money, Sheila, why didn't you come to me?"

"I went to no one. I am paying for learning shorthand at an evening school."

"Gad, Sheila! But you're a wonder."

The play was a bright musical comedy. Just the sort of play Bob would select. The music was catchy, the girls pretty. I was delighted with it. Afterward we went to a restaurant near the theatre and had what Bob called "a little supper." I laughed at his idea of a "little supper" as one delectable dish after another was brought on.

The music was lovely. A number of couples were dancing, and when Bob proposed we have a dance for old time's sake I just couldn't refuse.

Bob hadn't lost any of his love for dancing; nor any of his agility. We danced every dance until one o'clock. I felt delightfully wicked and not a bit like a working girl. When I told Bob so, he laughed a little and answered:

"It's because of the company you're keeping."

"But it is wicked for me to stay out so late; and to dance in so public a place——"

"Why?" Bob interrupted. "You never used to object."

"It is different now, Bob. And this is the last time."

"We'll see about that! Now I've found you I'm not going to lose you so easily, young lady."

"But, Bob, I must not do the things I used to do. I have neither time nor strength for them, to say nothing of what Madame Grundy would say."

"She's a catty old thing, and we don't care what she says."

"I do, Bob! I must." I told him so seriously he knew I meant it.

"Did you have a pleasant evening?" Mr. Hunt asked as he hung up his hat the next morning.

"Very!" I replied. Then I told him what play we saw, and that we had gone to supper afterward. I said nothing about dancing. Some way I felt he would not approve.

It was a little hard to settle down to work. I felt that I had been only right when I had told Bob that I hadn't strength to work and play both. Mother

would have called it burning the candle at both ends.

About half past three I sighed so audibly Mr. Hunt heard and laughed.

"Put your work up for the day, Miss Andrews. Go home and go to bed. You've two nights' loss of sleep to make up, you know."

I thanked him and hurried away. I went directly to bed. I never wakened until the next morning at my usual time. I had cautioned Mrs. Murphy to tell Jennie not to disturb me, that I didn't want dinner.

"No wonder you didn't want to eat!" Jennie grumbled in the morning as we breakfasted together in her room. "You've been eating that fancy stuff with that old beau of yours till your poor little tummie couldn't hold any more. I'm surprised you can eat any breakfast."

"It tastes awfully good, Jennie!" I declared.

"I see you are feeling all right again," Mr. Hunt said smilingly.

"Yes, thanks to following your prescription," I replied. "I went directly to bed and didn't get up until this morning."

"It has done you good. You look very—rested." I noticed his hesitation, but attached no meaning to it.

"I am," I replied, as I opened my desk.

Bob's presence had an unsettling effect for some little time. Yet I had begun to realize that a working girl's life has compensations, that the new interest

was making a better woman of me, surely a more useful one.

I determined to try to forget all the other side and to think only of the things that made my advancement. I would be a working girl, but one whose work counted because she did her best in every way, and did not waste herself foolishly.

I did not intend to become a recluse, but I did intend to give the best that was in me to my work. My play should be simple play, not heavy dinners and late suppers.

Jennie and James were to be married in a month. They had rented a little four-room apartment quite a way up town. It was in a new house, and everything was spick and span. One room was for me, the best one in the flat. I had to ride in the subway anyway, and it would take me only a few moments longer to get to the office.

Jennie had shown very good taste in furnishing the tiny home. Soft cretonnes and dainty muslins made it look very attractive when compared to Mrs. Murphy's dingy boarding-house rooms.

Mrs. Murphy cried when we told her that we were going in a month.

"Shure it would have bin bad enough to lose one of you, but the both of you leavin' me is too much," she said.

"Who knows but Jennie will get tired of me and send me back," I said.

"No such luck," she wailed. "It would only be

somethin' dreadful would bring you back; and God knows, dearie, I don't want you that way."

As I passed the hall rack on my way upstairs I noticed a letter addressed to me in Bob's handwriting.

I took off my things, bathed my face and hands, then sat down by the window to read it.

"Dearest Sheila:—I have thought of little else but you, and that awful rooming house where you live, since I left New York. Why won't you marry me, dear, and let me take care of you? Or, if you won't do that, why not let me give or loan you enough to make you comfortable? I have so much money I don't know what to do with it—a great husky fellow, and you, dainty, carefully brought up in luxury, working for fifteen dollars a week; and living in such squalid surroundings. Why just to go into that awful parlor is enough to give one the blues for a month. Ugh! I can see that crayoned Mr. Murphy looking down at me now, and those tipsy wax flowers that make one think of the graveyard. No fooling, dear, but how can you stand it? Would you rather live like that than to marry me? You must dislike me awfully if you would. I am almost hopeless. But I never shall give up entirely until you are married. Is there anyone else, Sheila? Have you met someone you care for, or have you fallen in love with your employer? Remember, you praised him to me. I wish I could carry you off as did the knights of old. I'd make you care for me. Really, dear, I'm not a

bad sort. Just a silly good-for-nothing spoiled by well—by everything.

"I have written to a man in New York, a Mr. Cartwright. He is an old friend of father's. He will give you a position at twenty-five dollars a week if you are still determined to take nothing from me, not even myself. He will communicate with you in some way. Please get a better place to live. You can at least do that without depriving your mother of what you seem to feel you must send her. As I told you, I will see Harold occasionally and see that he is running straight. I'll look him up in a day or two and tell him of you, that you are well, and, I hope, yes, Sheila, I really hope, you are happy; though I do not see how it is possible under the conditions. Yours always,

"Bob."

The letter dropped into my lap. I half laughed, half sighed as I thought of Bob's persistence. Why couldn't I do as he wished? Then, as plainly as if he were in the room, Clark Cummings's face came between me and the letter. I tried to reason with myself, to laugh at my foolishness in hugging to my heart this veritable will o' the wisp of love which never could be realized. Clark probably had forgotten my very existence. But had he? If so would his face, his words, be constantly before me? Again I smiled to think how foolish I was. I would try to make myself forget; try to be sensible and marry Bob, if only for mother's sake some day.

When Jennie came in the letter still lay on my lap. I still sat musing by the window.

"What's the matter?" she asked, as she found a match and lighted the gas. "What you mooning here in the dark about? Anything happened to-day?"

"No—that is I found a long letter from Bob Merrick when I got home, the young man who visited me last week."

"What does he want? I suppose he's asking you to marry him?"

"You're a wizard, Jennie. How in the world did you guess it?"

"No girl sits mooning in the dark unless some fellow is mixed up in it. You wouldn't be a-doing it over a bill, would you?" she asked. "Well, what about it? Going to take him?"

"No, Jennie. I never shall marry Bob Merrick—that is, not for years and years anyway," I said.

Jennie looked steadily at me a moment when I declared I wouldn't marry Bob.

"Why won't you marry him, Sheila?" she asked. "You ain't got no other fellow, and he's rich. I'd hate like thunder to have you go back to Chicago, but if you was to have loads of money and live the way you used to I wouldn't say anything."

"I'm going to live with you and Jim in your little flat," I returned. "That is, unless you've changed your minds and don't want me."

"Want you!" Jennie repeated, her face lighting up

wonderfully. "You'll never know how bad we'd feel if you didn't come."

I told her Bob had written that he would secure me a better place at twenty-five dollars a week, but that I could not accept it.

"But you'll tell Mr. Hunt that you had the chance, won't you?" she asked after I had carefully explained all the reasons why I couldn't leave him. "Then he'll most likely give you the same because you stayed."

"No, Jennie. I shall say nothing about it. If I am ever worth more than I now get Mr. Hunt will give it to me. I should be very ungrateful either to leave him, or to demand more pay because of Bob's meddling. I am far from being either expert, or necessary to him yet."

"All I got to say is you're a queer girl, Sheila. Come, let's go eat! Jim ain't coming to-night. He's found a place where he can work three evenings a week, and he's going to take it until we get married. He seen a dining-room suite he likes, but we ain't got money enough to buy. It has a serving table; whatever they use 'em for, and he said to me the very minute he seen it:

" 'Miss Sheila will like that. Perhaps she had one in her home in Chicago she told you about.' "

After we returned from our dinner, Jennie brought her sewing into my room while I answered Bob's letter.

"Dear Bob:—You foolish boy! When will you learn to stop urging me to marry you? I am very

fond of you, Bob; you are a part of my happy past. But I am not ready to marry—shall not be for years and years. I am a working girl now, but you do not seem able to grasp it. Thank you, Bob, for your interest in me. But I shall have to refuse to leave Mr. Hunt, even for the larger salary, which under other conditions would be an inducement, not because of any feeling for Mr. Hunt, save that of gratitude. And do not worry any longer about the effect crayon portraits and wax flowers may have on my disposition. Jennie and Jim—you remember them—are soon to be married. They have rented a little apartment way up town near a park, and have furnished the best room in it for me. It is very dainty and pretty, so set your mind at rest concerning my surroundings.

"I am so glad that you see Harold once in a while. He has proven himself a dear, manly boy, and I am very proud of him. You say you hope I am happy, though you do not see how it is possible. My dear Bob, my work keeps me busy; is now so congenial that it makes me happy to a certain extent. Isn't happiness a matter of comparison anyway? I am so busy I haven't time to think—to repine. Try working yourself, and see if I'm not right.

"With sincere wishes for your happiness,

"Sheila Andrews."

CHAPTER X

The next morning when I passed through the outer office I noticed Mr. Rogers in close conversation with a stranger. I gave it no thought. Why should I? I had forgotten Bob's writing for a position for me. When I answered his letter and told him I should refuse it, I had considered the incident closed, and had dismissed it from my mind.

The stock market was very active that morning, and save for a few simple directions given in his usual manner I saw nothing of Mr. Hunt.

When I returned from lunch Mr. Hunt was seated at his desk. He glanced up, a peculiar look on his face.

"Never mind the work for a few minutes, Miss Andrews. I want to talk to you," he said as I started to open my desk.

I waited quietly.

"Why do you wish to leave us, Miss Andrews?" he asked, looking directly at me as was his fashion.

"Want to—leave you?" I returned.

I had entirely forgotten Bob's kindly meant interference in the surprise caused by the question.

"Yes. Rogers tells me that the manager of Cartwright & Co. was here this morning asking as to your

ability, your fitness for the place. He told me you had accepted a position as confidential secretary to Mr. Cartwright at twenty-five dollars a week. Is this so?

"Had you come to me with Cartwright's offer, don't you suppose I should have met it? If you are worth twenty-five dollars to Cartwright, a stranger, you are surely worth as much to me, who——" he stopped, flushed a little, then waited.

"Oh, please, Mr. Hunt!" I exclaimed. "I never meant you should know anything about it! and I surely never meant to accept the position. You remember Bob Merrick, the young man from home. You saw us at the restaurant one night. He, Bob, asked me all about my position, how much I earned, etc. I had nothing to hide, so I told him. He is a millionaire, so the amount I earn seemed appallingly meagre to him, though I explained carefully that it was all and more than I was worth. I received a letter from him yesterday in which he said he had written to Mr. Cartwright—who is an old friend of his father's—and had secured me the position of secretary at twenty-five dollars a week. I answered the letter immediately. I told him I could not consider any such proposition."

"But why did you not intend to tell me of this offer?" Mr. Hunt asked.

"Why should I bother you with such a trifle? You have been more than kind; and I know you are giving me more than I am worth."

"But if you can get twenty-five dollars, why should you work for me—us, for fifteen dollars?"

"Because when I was worth nothing you gave me encouragement and enough to live on. You taught me how to help, how to better, myself. It would have been rank ingratitude to have taken advantage of Bob's offer in any way."

"You are one in a thousand, Miss Andrews," he said rather huskily as he touched the bell. "Send Mr. Rogers to me," he ordered.

Mr. Rogers came in.

"Hereafter, Rogers, Miss Andrews's salary will be twenty-five dollars a week."

A more crestfallen looking individual I never saw. He, I was sure, by making it appear that I had taken another position without consulting Mr. Hunt, hoped to be rid of me. And more to relieve a certain tension which had suddenly made itself felt than from a desire to say anything, I remarked, as the door closed after the manager:

"I am afraid Mr. Rogers is disappointed," at which we both laughed, and the old pleasant feeling of confidence reasserted itself.

That night when I went home Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor were busily talking together in the outer office. The suddenness with which their conversation ceased, as well as the malevolent glances cast in my direction, left no doubt in my mind that I had been the subject of their discussion.

But I gave it not a moment's thought. I was so

happy over my good fortune, so anxious to get home and tell Jennie all about it, that what they said or thought made no difference to me. I could soon pay the balance I still owed at the shorthand school, and then I could send mother ten dollars every week. Wouldn't she be surprised and pleased? With what Harold gave her she could be quite comfortable. But I sighed as I thought of dear mother, who used never to hesitate to spend hundreds.

Jennie had declared she wouldn't take but four dollars a week for my room, breakfasts, and Sunday's dinner. Our weekday dinners we were to get out, as Jennie was to keep her position.

I would have to spend a little for clothes. I still had quantities of useless clothing—useless now to me; but I needed some good plain dresses for the office, shoes, a heavy coat suitable for bad weather, etc.

"Jennie!" I called as soon as I reached the top of the stairs. "Come in quickly! I have something to tell you."

"I'll be there in a minute! I'm making myself so lovely Jim'll be afraid of me, or else think it is someone else," she called back.

In a moment she came in, her face looking as if she had put it in a flour barrel. She jumped on to the bed as was her habit, hugged her knees, then said: "Fire away! I'm listening."

"Oh, Jennie," I commenced. "Mr. Hunt heard about the other man's offer and when he found I had no idea of leaving him he raised my salary to twenty-

five dollars a week. He called in that manager who hates me and told him so. Now, dear, you must take five dollars for your room and breakfasts."

"I'll do no such thing! You don't eat mor'n a bird no way. But I'm wondering what you'll do with so much money. I expect you'll be starting a bank account with it."

"Not right away!" I replied. "I shall send mother ten dollars every week, and I must get some clothes. But just think, Jennie! only a little while ago I was getting six dollars. Now I am to have twenty-five dollars."

"I knowed all the time you'd get it as soon as you got your bearings. That man you work for knows a thing or two and don't you forget it! Remember how smart he was about showing that piker Rogers where he got off? He knows not many real ladies like you go to work and ever make good; and that when they do they are the best ever. You are all to the merry, Sheila, and Jim will be as glad as I am."

"Now that I'm rich, Jennie, I am going to give Jim a surprise," I said, knowing only too well that Jennie would accept for him what she would not for herself. "I'd make it for you, too, but I have so little time we'll both have to work hard to make it a success."

"What kind of a surprise?" she asked, all interest at once when she found it was something for Jim.

"Instead of going to the minister to be married, you must be married in the flat. We'll have a wed-

ding supper and everything. I'll trim the table with greens and buy the wedding cake. You'll have a really stylish wedding. Don't you think Jim would like that?"

"Like it!" she repeated, her eyes shining, "I'll wallop him if he don't. But you mustn't spend too much, Sheila."

"I won't. You aren't going to get married every day, you know, Jennie, and Mrs. Murphy will help me."

Jennie was to be married Saturday afternoon. Then on Monday I was to move my possessions up to the flat.

There was only a week more. How busy we were! I made out the menu and asked Mrs. Murphy to see that we had everything we needed. Then I asked her to come and cook the dinner, but as one of the guests.

Jennie was delighted with the menu. We were to have a clear soup, broiled chicken, two vegetables, a fancy salad, and ice cream, coffee and the wedding cake.

Mrs. Murphy was in an unusual state of excitement these last few days, more than the occasion warranted, I thought. I never dreamed that she had a little secret all her own until she asked us to be her guests on Friday evening.

"Be down in the parlor by a quarter to seven, please," she said. "Bring Jim along, Jennie."

"I expect she is going to give us lemonade and

cake," I told Jennie. "She did once when a lodger she liked very much went away, and she is to lose both of us, you know."

"She's a fine landlady, all right! It was nice of her to ask Jim," Jennie returned.

The next day Mr. Hunt mentioned Jennie, and I told him of the approaching wedding. He seemed so interested that I went on and told him of the flat, that I was to give them the wedding supper, and then live with them afterward.

"I always shall think of that girl pleasantly," he told me. "She's true blue, even if she is a little rough."

"Oh, she is! No one knows it as well as I do." Then, without thinking, I added, "I wish you could come to her wedding."

"I wish so, too!" he replied half laughingly, still I saw that he meant it. "But I'm not invited."

"I'll ask Jennie—that is, if you are sure you want to come."

"I don't know of anything I would rather do," he replied. "Shall I dress—if I get an invitation?"

"My, no!—perhaps you might wear a white vest. Jim is going to."

"A white weskit it is," he laughed, then he took a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket, and said:

"Please go home now and buy the bride a present with this. I wouldn't know what to get her, and I am sure you will."

I wonder if anyone can imagine how hard it was

to spend that fifty dollars? I thought of hundreds of things I wanted to buy with it, but finally decided to put it all into some good silver. Knives and forks and spoons.

Jennie was delighted. She confided that it had been worrying her that she had nothing but cheap tableware. Jim, too, she said, would be as pleased as she was. He was just crazy about the dining room.

"Wouldn't it be nice to invite Mr. Hunt to the wedding?" I asked, as innocently as I could.

"Why, yes, let's do it!" Jennie replied, and, acting on my suggestion, she wrote him a cordial note asking him to come. We didn't tell Jim. It would be an added surprise.

Friday night Jennie and I dressed ourselves, then waited for Jim. Mrs. Murphy had cautioned us several times to be sure and get there when she told us, at a quarter of seven. Jim came in time, so, just at the exact moment, we presented ourselves at the parlor door.

As Jim pushed the door open we all three drew back in astonishment. The parlor was full of people. Mrs. Murphy in her Sunday best stood in the centre of the room, and the moment she saw us called "Surprise!" at the top of her lungs. Then everybody began talking at once.

As I look back and think of that night I wonder if ever there was a stranger company. There was the little music teacher, pale and anæmic, who rented the

back parlor with the privilege of giving music lessons at thirty-five cents an hour, and the two shop girls who roomed on the next floor and who dressed stylishly, according to their lights, and who were painted and powdered and frizzled for the occasion. There were the two maiden sisters who had lived with Mrs. Murphy for ten years. They had a little income, just enough to exist on, and they were dressed in black silk and mitts. The driver of a grocery wagon, and the young engineer looking for his first job hobnobbed in the corner, while the long-haired violinist whom we scarcely ever saw held his fiddle under his chin waiting for the noise to subside, ready for the welcome Mrs. Murphy had asked him to play. Then there was the actress out of a job, who was to recite later in the evening. Her blonde hair, formerly peroxided, had gone gray for lack of funds for the process.

We advanced into the room, Jim blushing and embarrassed, Jennie proud that we were so honored; and I—well, I was undecided whether to laugh or cry.

Signor Cavotti now took the centre of the room. With a flourish he placed a handkerchief under his chin; threw back his mane of coal black hair, and began to play. All hushed to listen. It was the first time the musician had so honored Mrs. Murphy's "guests." When he finished the applause was long and loud. He bowed graciously and responded to the encore by playing "My Old Kentucky Home," then

with another sweeping bow he retired to make room for the actress.

She rested her hand on the table which held the tipsy wax blossoms under their glass dome, and recited James Whitcomb Riley's "An Old Sweetheart of Mine." She also received an encore, and then to the delight of the assembled company she gave them "Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night." Jim and Jennie were entranced. The two maiden ladies swung out every time the actress lurched forward in imitation of the swinging bell. The grocery boy giggled; and the young engineer had a hard time not to laugh. Cavotti was plainly bored—by professional jealousy, no doubt.

After both performers had been warmly congratulated, Mrs. Murphy disappeared only to return almost immediately, followed by her maid of all work, with sewing tables, which, judging from their looks and wabbly condition, she had borrowed from her roomers. Towels were spread over the tables, knives, forks, and spoons laid, in regular order. Then came the food, big bowls of chicken salad with thin bread and butter, great glass pitchers of lemonade, ice cream, and cake. It was truly a wonderful feast.

And Mrs. Murphy beamed with happiness as she urged us to eat all we wanted, because there was plenty more in the kitchen. The engaged couple were toasted in glasses of lemonade, and then Jim was called upon to make a speech. He was so embar-

rassed he could only mumble: "Thank you." But Jennie rose to the occasion gallantly:

"It was awful good of you, Mrs. Murphy, to have this party for us, and I sha'n't never forget it. Neither will Jim, even if he can't talk. You must all come and see us in our flat. Just let us know when you're coming so we'll be home, and have something to eat in the house. That's all, I guess, and thank you."

Everybody clapped when Jennie sat down. Someway, no matter what Jennie did, no one ever laughed at her, only with her. I think everyone recognized instinctively that she was good and honest.

After the remnants of the supper had been cleared away a wheezy music box appeared from somewhere and we danced. I danced with the driver of the grocery wagon, who was too intent on the steps, or too embarrassed, to speak; with the young engineer, who confided his hopes and fears to me; with the violinist, who told me that I could make my fortune dancing on the stage, and offered to introduce me at the theatre where he played in the orchestra. Last of all I danced with Jim. He trod on my toes, and fell all over himself, but I didn't mind it a bit. Then he and Mrs. Murphy danced together and the party was over.

I shall not pretend that I did not enjoy it, for I did! It was twelve o'clock when we said good-night, and assured Mrs. Murphy that her party was an unqualified success. I left Jim and Jennie on the

stairs saying good night to each other. But after I had closed my door there floated to my ears a fragment of their conversation:

"That'll do, Jim. You go right home and get to bed. You'll have all the rest of your life to kiss me. Run along, now, and don't forget we're to get spliced at six o'clock."

Finally I fell asleep, and dreamed of parties where lemonade and ice cream were in the same dish; where I danced with Mrs. Murphy, and other things as ridiculous. I did not awaken until Jennie rapped at the door and called:

"Get up, lazy bones. Ain't you ashamed to be a-sleeping so late and it my wedding day?"

I jumped up, and opened the door. Jennie had a steaming cup of coffee and a plate of toast for me.

"I knowed you'd be late if you stopped to get anything," she told me, "and I ain't working to-day."

I hurried through my breakfast and down town. I was a little late, however. It was my first offense, yet Mr. Rogers looked meaningly at the clock as I passed through the office. I flushed at the implied rebuke, but made no apology. Mr. Hunt was already at his desk and to him I said:

"Please pardon me for being late this morning, Mr. Hunt, I was very gay last night, and overslept."

"Gay! In what way, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Murphy—my landlady—gave a party for Jennie and me."

He made me tell him all about it before I went to

work; and he laughed so heartily that Miss Cantor made an excuse to come in. He dismissed her rather curtly I thought. Then said:

"I shall have to make Mrs. Murphy's acquaintance. I am really envious."

The morning passed very quickly, and at twelve o'clock I rushed away, to the evident astonishment of the office force.

I went directly to the little flat up in the Bronx. Mrs. Murphy and Jennie were already there, and, as Jennie expressed it, "Up to our eyes in work!"

Some carnations and smilax I had ordered had arrived, and I started to arrange the table. I should have to go back to Mrs. Murphy's to dress. She had brought her best black silk with her, and would change after the hardest part of the work was done. Her maid of all work was to wash up after the supper.

Jennie had moved all her belongings that morning, and merrily told me that now the old trunk of which she had been so ashamed could go in the storeroom. Her dress, shoes, and stockings were laid out all ready to put on. She had allowed me to choose the dress. It was of white crêpe de chine, made very simply. I gave her a tiny bit of real lace I had in my trunk for the neck and sleeves. She had nice black shoes, and I also found a pair of silk stockings for her. I bemoaned the fact that my salary had not been raised sooner, then I could have done much more.

"As if you hadn't done enough!" Jennie sniffed.

"I'm so giddy with pride, I'm afraid I'll faint before Jim has time to say yes to the preacher. Just look at them lingerie! Why, I ain't never seen nothing like 'em, only in store winders."

I had given her an entire outfit of underwear for a part of my wedding present. They were lovely, dainty things, some mother had bought for me toward the last, and which I had never worn.

Just as I was in the throes of trailing the smilax over the tablecloth to suit me the bell rang. Jennie went to the door and returned with an enormous box, her face shining with excitement and happiness.

"Open it quickly!" I said, looking up from the floor, where I was untwining a particularly refractory length of smilax, "I wonder what it can be!"

Jennie tore off the string, then opened the box. On top of the tissue paper which covered a wonderful bouquet of old-fashioned flowers was a sheet of paper with the names of all the roomers at Mrs. Murphy's. Not one was missing.

"Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Murphy, come here quick!" Jennie called, then flopped on the floor beside me, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What are you cryin' for?" Mrs. Murphy asked. "I knew all about it."

Scarcely had we recovered from this surprise when again the bell rang. Jennie jumped up and hurried to the door. This time she brought in a long thin box.

"Do hurry and open it!" I urged, getting up to help. "I believe I am more excited than you are."

"Oh!" Jennie gasped as she raised the cover and a lovely damask table-cloth and napkins were exposed.

"Whom is it from?" I asked, as we unfolded it the better to see the pattern, Mrs. Murphy meanwhile counting the napkins.

"I don't—here's a card," and Jennie picked the card from the floor, where it had fallen. "Henry Arnold," she read. "You know I asked him, Sheila."

"There's a full dozen!" Mrs. Murphy interrupted before I could answer.

"I'm glad you asked him, Jennie; he has been very kind to you, and this is a lovely gift. It is fine enough for anyone or any occasion."

"Let's use it to-night!" she replied. Then as I looked ruefully at my work, which would all have to be done over again, she whimsically said: "I ain't getting married every day, you know, Sheila."

"You shall have your nice cloth," I declared, as I unpinned the smilax.

"There's the bell again!" Mrs. Murphy called. "If anything more comes you won't have no wedding supper; them chickens ain't lost their pin-feathers yet."

CHAPTER XI

Mrs. Murphy went to the door. Jennie was too busy helping me spread the new cloth on the table.

"The land of goodness! What's that?" Jennie asked, as her former landlady staggered into the room with a box so large she scarcely could carry it in her arms.

"If this keeps up I shall get married myself!" I declared.

"Roses!" Jennie gasped. "American Beauty Roses for me!"

There they were, a dozen of them, with yard-long stems. Then there was another box inside the large one. She opened that with trembling fingers. Inside were three bunches or bouquets of flowers, one of white peas and maidenhair fern for Jennie, lavender and pink peas for Mrs. Murphy, and an exquisite bunch of violets for me.

"Just think, Sheila! All this for me, a poor girl like me. Jim'll be that proud when he knows."

"You'll have to eat them pin-feathers!" Mrs. Murphy declared, as she sniffed the perfume of the roses, and held her bunch of sweet peas close to her bosom. "To think of him a-rememberin' of me. An old woman like me."

"But who sent them?" I asked, though I knew it could be no one but Mr. Hunt.

"That boss of yours! Didn't you see his pasteboard?" Jennie replied. "He's the goods! I wish you'd marry him, Sheila!"

"No matchmaking, please, Miss Jennie!" I returned.

My, how busy we were! The table to fix all over with the lovely linen; such a wealth of flowers to trim not only the table, but the entire flat. They added just the right touch to the dainty freshness of the rooms. Before we were half through Mrs. Murphy grumblingly returned to the kitchen, once more to attack the chickens.

Everything was ready. Mrs. Murphy was dressed; the little helper had arrived; and Jennie was lying down to rest for half an hour. I had a terrible time to make her consent, but finally she did it to please me. I should have just time to hurry home and dress and get back a little before six o'clock.

As I started out of the door a special delivery postman handed me a letter. For a moment I was too startled to open it. Had something happened to mother? Then I realized if there had I should have been telegraphed. So I tore open the envelope and a check fluttered to the floor. I picked it up, and before I read the letter I looked at the signature. It was from Bob Merrick.

"Dear Sheila," the letter began, "you will take nothing for yourself; perhaps you will use this to buy

your friend Jennie a wedding present. Or give her the money. You told me she had been good to you. As ever, Bob."

"Oh, Jennie!" I called, rushing back like a whirlwind. "I have another present for you. Mr. Merrick, you know, Bob Merrick has sent you a hundred dollars. He says to do just as you like with it. Buy something: or save the money. What'll you do?"

"A hundred dollars! Why, Sheila!" And Jennie just laid her head down on the table and sobbed out loud. After a moment she looked up. "Sheila, was there ever a poor girl so happy as me? And it's all your fault! All you, I mean! Would you think it all right to just let Jim and me put that money away? We don't need nothing more. Why, I can't think of a single thing that I want. It would please Jim, I think," she added so bashfully for her that I immediately hugged her.

"Indeed you shall have it. It will be a nice little nest egg. I'll get the check cashed so Jim can see the real money. It will seem more like a wedding present."

"Will you? And will you put it in an envelope and mark it for Jennie and Jim? It don't seem fair that the girl has all the presents."

I hurried away. I must get hold of Mr. Hunt in some way. He would cash the check. I looked through the telephone book until I found his home address, a bachelor apartment just off Fifth Avenue.

Yes, he would cash it. And please wouldn't I let him take me up in his machine.

"I know you must be tired, and you are terribly excited, I can tell by your voice."

"Yes, I'll be glad to have you take me," I told him, "and I am tired and excited. I guess you would have been, too, had you been up there all the afternoon."

"You must tell me all about it on the way up. I'll call for you in about twenty minutes."

"Please give me half an hour. I've just reached the house and have to dress."

In exactly half an hour I heard the honk-honk of Mr. Hunt's car in the street. I ran down the stairs before he could ring the bell.

"Now, tell me all about this afternoon. Please do not skip a thing; I am terribly interested." We both laughed.

"First, let me thank you for my violets. And it was so kind and thoughtful of you to remember Mrs. Murphy; even though you came near having to eat pin-feathers because of it."

"Eat pin-feathers! What do you mean?" he asked, laughing.

"Why, Mrs. Murphy was so excited because you had remembered her, and so pleased with the attention that she said if anything more happened we would have to eat the pin-feathers because she wouldn't have time to take them out of the chickens."

I never heard anyone laugh more heartily.

"Go on! Don't miss a thing," he said, when he could speak.

"I had the table nearly arranged when the table cloth and napkins came from Mr. Arnold. Mrs. Murphy counted the napkins while Jennie and I were enthusing over the cloth. Then she announced in a satisfied voice that there was a full dozen. Jennie wanted to use the new cloth; told me she wasn't married every day, so I took the other cloth off and did my work of decorating all over again. I am sure you will think the place looks very attractive; your roses make the little living room lovely."

"I am glad if they added to your—Jennie's pleasure," he replied. "Isn't there something more? We'll be there in a little while now, and I want to be posted."

"Oh, yes! I nearly forgot. When that check came from Bob—Mr. Merrick—he said to let Jennie have the money if she preferred. That is why I asked you to cash the check. Then Jennie asked me if I wouldn't put it in an envelope and put Jim's name on it with hers. She said:

" 'I don't think it is fair for the girl to have all the presents.' Really, Mr. Hunt, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the things which happened this afternoon."

"I don't wonder!" he returned. "Well, here we are!"

I was surprised. So busily had I been talking, so swiftly had the time passed, that I had no idea we were there.

We were the first except Jim to arrive.

"I am afraid I shall be in the way," Mr. Hunt remarked, *sotto voce*, to me.

"No, you won't. Just sit quietly in the living room. The minister will be here in a few minutes."

"Where does he live? Can I fetch him?" he asked.

"What a brilliant idea!" I answered. "I'll ask Jim."

Jim was delighted.

"He lives only a little ways, about six blocks," he told Mr. Hunt, giving him the name and street number.

Mr. Arnold came immediately they had gone. Then two girls from the restaurant, girls who had been there a long time and with whom Jennie was rather intimate, Agnes Maloney and Annie Halley.

They came in rather bashfully when they saw Mr. Arnold; but he soon put them at ease. Each of the girls carried a bundle, both rather bulky.

"Here, Jennie! Many happy returns!" Agnes said bashfully.

As soon as I could compose myself, I returned, anxious to see Agnes's gift; also to hear what Annie would say.

Agnes had given her an electric lamp; a gay affair of awful reds and greens. Just then two friends of Jim's arrived.

Annie then presented her offering.

"With love to you and Jim," she said in a tone

which plainly showed she had rehearsed it, proffering a vase to match the lamp.

Then we heard the car, and in a moment Mr. Hunt and the minister came in and the company was complete.

Introductions were made all around. The latest gifts, which I had no time to remove, were admired, and the minister signified that he was ready whenever the bride and groom were.

"Jim and me want you and your boss to stand up with us," Jennie whispered.

"Why, of course, Jennie. Have you spoken to Mr. Hunt?"

"Jim's doing that right now," she replied, as Jim came into the bedroom.

"He'll do it!" he told us, his face beaming.

The ceremony was to be performed in the living room. I had banked the roses so they made a pretty background and had put some of the other flowers in vases around the room.

I felt strangely embarrassed as I met Mr. Hunt's eyes when we took our places in front of the minister. The simple service was soon over, and the bride and groom congratulated. Then Mrs. Murphy nobly rose to the occasion:

"Ladies and gentlemen, supper is served. Will you all take your places at the table? Your names is on little cards by the plates."

Amid much laughter, we obeyed. I was delighted when Mr. Hunt offered Mrs. Murphy his arm, but

not so pleased to be taken in by Mr. Arnold. Not that I felt anything but liking for him, but I had not seen him since I had refused to marry him, so naturally felt a little embarrassed.

We all stood and drank the bride's health in a bottle of wine that Mrs. Murphy produced, then the soup was served, and, after that, the chickens minus the pin-feathers. By the time the salad was served we were all chatting as gaily as if we had known each other all our lives.

"Isn't it lovely?" Agnes cried as the wedding cake was brought on, and I handed Jennie a knife.

"The bride must cut it," I said, when she begged me to do it for her. So she cut it and we all took a piece to dream on, even Mr. Hunt.

We sat a long time over the ice cream and coffee; then trooped into the living room to look again at the presents there displayed, all the silver we hadn't used on the table; the two napkins we had not used, the envelope with the hundred dollars; the lamp and vase; the cigars and humidor Jim's chums had given him, and last of all a surprise. While we were at the table the bell had rung, but as the little maid had answered none of us gave it a thought. Now, placed side by side, were two handsome, but serviceable leather chairs. A large wing chair for Jim, and a rocker for Jennie. Jim's employer had sent them.

Each and every one of us had to try both chairs. They were comfortable, and added to the looks of the room.

When the clock struck ten I whispered to Mrs. Murphy that it was time to go. She agreed with me, and we started for our wraps. Mr. Hunt insisted upon taking us home, also upon dropping Mr. Arnold on the way. That made it necessary for me to sit in front with him. The two young men took the waitresses home.

Before we finally got away, some one produced a bag of rice from somewhere, and threw it all over Jim and Jennie as they stood in the doorway.

"Poor Jennie!" I exclaimed. "She'll have that all to clean up in the morning."

"What's that!" grumbled Mrs. Murphy. "It's glad you'll be to clean up the rice when you marry the man you love."

Mr. Hunt talked all the way home of his good time, and of Jennie.

"That James Watson is a lucky fellow. He has won a girl who will make him a true wife."

"Jim is nice, too," I declared. "He is diffident, and doesn't appear at his best before strangers; but he is all right, and will make as good a husband as Jennie will a wife."

"That's right, Sheila, stick up for the men! Some girls think it's cute to run 'em down, but I say they're all right if you treat 'em right. I know. I had one of the most cantankerous men that ever wore pants. Tim Murphy was that when I married him. When he died he was that mild like he would eat out of my hand if I had told him to. And it was just because

I knowed how to handle him. Make 'em think you are all the time a-bowin' to 'em and they will do all the bowin' you want 'em to, and never know they're doin' it."

Mrs. Murphy wound up just as we reached home. Mr. Hunt laughed long and heartily.

"Bully for you, Mrs. Murphy! When you want to lecture about domestic affairs let me know! I'll find the audience."

Without understanding in the least what he meant Mrs. Murphy felt he was saying something complimentary, and was pleased accordingly.

"Good-night, Miss Andrews," Mr. Hunt said. "I want to thank you for one of the pleasantest evenings I have ever spent, also for the honor you conferred upon me by standing with me during the ceremony."

I blushed furiously; why, I could not have told. But I looked into his face and said:

"I was just as happy as you were," then ran into the house.

Mrs. Murphy insisted upon climbing all the way up to my room to talk things over. She was a big, fat woman and it was several minutes before she could talk. Finally she remarked:

"I've been to lots of weddin's in my time, but never to one like Jennie's. There wasn't a hitch nowhere. And wasn't the supper good? It must have cost a lot, Miss Sheila, and if—if you can't afford it let me help."

"Indeed I can afford it, Mrs. Murphy," I assured

her, touched by her offer. "I had my salary raised a day or two ago and now I am earning twenty-five dollars a week. So you see I didn't do anything so very extravagant."

"And to think you're leavin' when you could afford the second floor back, which ain't empty just now, but might be before long."

"But I promised Jennie to live with her long ago, Mrs. Murphy."

"I know, Miss Sheila, and it's right for you to go. Ain't she fixed your room up grand? And just think of that Mr. Hunt givin' me his arm to the table, same as if I was quality. And did you notice he had on a white vest just like Jim's? It was wonderful too, that Chicago beau of your'n sendin' them a hundred dollars. I'll bet it was on your account!" the shrewd old lady added. Then she ran on again: "And them chairs from Jim's boss. Wasn't they fine? But I'll tell you somethin', only you mustn't tell. When I set down in that one he give to Jennie, the rocker, I thought on my soul I was there for the rest of my life it was that tight fit."

"You cooked the dinner perfectly," I said, when I could speak. "Wasn't it nice of those two girls to bring Jennie presents? Oh, wasn't it funny when Agnes wished her many happy returns of the day? Poor Jennie, I should think one husband enough."

"And that table was a picture," Mrs. Murphy broke in. "Them green vines running all over it, and the pretty bunch of flowers in the middle. Did you

notice what a time I had to keep from smashing my flowers on the edge of the table? I ain't so slim as I was once, and I got 'em pinned too low."

"No, I didn't notice."

"And didn't Jennie look pretty, but you and Mr. Hunt are the fine-lookin' couple. It seemed a pity you didn't get tied, too. I guess the minister wouldn't have charged extra. And there was plenty of everything; and——"

"Oh, Mrs. Murphy, please!" I gasped, holding my sides. "If I laugh any more to-night I shall die."

"It won't hurt you none to laugh a little. You ain't been using your mouth that way very much since you come here. Remember you are to eat with me all day to-morrow, Miss Sheila. We will eat breakfast late; then you can get all your packin' done by dinner time. Then we'll take a little walk before you go to bed, like you and Jennie used to."

After she left I undressed, and was asleep almost before I touched the pillow, and did not waken until I heard a rap on my door and Mrs. Murphy's labored breathing outside.

I jumped up feeling guilty. Poor, fat Mrs. Murphy coming all the way up to call me. I opened the door and not only had she climbed those awful stairs, but she had carried a heavy tray on which was arranged a dainty breakfast.

"The girl wanted to bring it up," she said when she recovered her breath, "but I told her to keep her hands off that tray. And she did!"

I made her come in and stay with me while I ate. It was ten o'clock, and she had eaten her breakfast hours ago.

"I didn't want to wake you up," she said. "I knowed you was tired."

All the time I was eating Mrs. Murphy talked of the wedding, Mr. Hunt's kindness to her, etc. I told her what he said about wanting to become acquainted with her when I told him of the party she gave for Jennie and me. I never saw anyone more delighted.

"I'll have to give another one just for him," she laughed.

"Please invite me, too," I said.

"Yes, just you two and the parson," she rejoined.

"I don't see why you are all so keen on marrying me off to someone. You and Jennie seem awfully anxious to be rid of me."

"Oh, go 'way, now!" she laughed. "You know I was a-foolin'! All the same that boss of yourn would make a fine husband! He's the makin's of a man in him."

After she went downstairs I had a good laugh over her quaint expression, "the makin's of a man!" I would surely tell Mr. Hunt on Monday.

When Mrs. Murphy sent the maid to call me to her mid-afternoon meal I was all ready to go. My handbag stood gaping open wide waiting until morning to receive my toilet articles and night clothes. Both my trunks were locked and strapped.

We had a cosy dinner all by ourselves in Mrs. Murphy's own sitting room in the front basement,

then after we had talked a little we put on our wraps and went for a walk. We had gone but a little way when I saw Mr. Hunt coming toward us in his machine.

"Are you two ladies going anywhere in particular, and if so may I set you down?" he asked as he drew up to the sidewalk.

"We're just out for an airin'," Mrs. Murphy replied. "Miss Sheila and Jennie always did, leastways they done it when Jim didn't come round, so I thought I'd try to take Jennie's place, though to tell the gospel truth I ain't much on walkin'!"

"Please let me take you for your airing," he urged.

"We sure will, and be that proud to go!" She climbed into the tonneau and settled herself comfortably.

"You get in front with Mr. Hunt," she went on. "I can fill this seat pretty well by myself; and then you two can talk all you want to."

"Please!" Mr. Hunt said, and touched my arm. I made no objection but took my seat beside my employer.

We had a delightful ride, and then to my astonishment, and I confess it, my chagrin, Mrs. Murphy invited Mr. Hunt to come in.

He accepted with alacrity. I felt annoyed, and was provoked at myself for the feeling. Now he would see the parlor; that place which had so affected Bob. But there was no help for it, so I tried to appear natural.

"I'll be right back!" Mrs. Murphy said, as she left us after lighting the gas over the centre table. "That's Mr. Murphy. It's a fine picture, too," pointing to the crayon of the late departed Tim.

Her remark brought back to both of us her little talk anent that same Tim the night of the wedding, and how she had coaxed and wheedled him into shape. We laughed together and then suddenly I was ashamed of the cheap pride I had felt for a few moments. Mrs. Murphy had given me of her best since first I went there to live. Who was I that I should feel ashamed of her, or her home?

Before she came back I told Mr. Hunt what she had said about him. He laughed heartily.

"So she thinks I have the makin's of a man in me, does she?" he asked. "I hope that I have."

"Did you think that I was never a-comin'?" Mrs. Murphy asked, as the maid held the door open.

She carried a tray on which was a pitcher of lemonade and some glasses and a cake, her usual refreshment for callers.

"I haven't had anything taste so good since I was a little boy," Mr. Hunt declared as he offered his glass to be refilled. Then he told her stories of the country place he had lived in when a boy, the church socials, where he drank lemonade until his mother compelled him to stop, and many other boyish pranks, which delighted her.

"I am coming again if I may," he said when he bade us good-night.

CHAPTER XII

I HAD had so much excitement, so much extra work in connection with Jennie's wedding, that I felt unusually tired.

The next morning I bade Mrs. Murphy good-by, and although happy over my dainty room at Jennie's, I found the tears very near as she wept bitterly.

Mr. Hunt was unusually talkative that day. The market was quiet, and he remained in his private office with me nearly the entire day. He laughed over the happenings at Jennie's wedding; said he didn't wonder Mrs. Murphy wept at losing me; that he would have done the same in her place, and finally asked me if he might come up and see how I was situated in my new home.

"I shall want to call on Mr. and Mrs. Watson, anyway, so you may as well say yes," he told me.

"Well, then, 'Yes,'" I repeated after him.

"Thank you," he said, more seriously than the occasion or the privilege warranted.

When I reached the apartment that night Jennie and Jim were both there.

"Mr. Arnold let me off at noon," Jennie told me.

"He said Jim'd be getting a divorce if he got home first."

"When I do I'll be dead," Jim declared, kissing Jennie.

My trunk had arrived and I spent the evening unpacking. Like Jennie, I was glad that I didn't have to keep it in my room, but that it could go in the storeroom. A trunk in the room gives one such a transient feeling. It seems as though any minute the expressman might call for it.

After I had finished Jennie insisted that we have a little supper of the left-overs from the wedding. I was not at all averse, so while Jennie brought in the food, Jim and I laid the table for three. There was plenty of cold chicken, celery and cake. Jennie made coffee and we sat and feasted and talked until the clock struck eleven, when I insisted that we wash the dishes, then go to bed. As usual Jennie objected to my doing any work, but I overruled her, and all three of us helped, Jim putting the things in place after I had dried them.

The next day the market activity was resumed, and I scarcely saw my employer all day. About half-past three he came in for a moment and said:

"I wish you would wait after the others go tonight, Miss Andrews. I have some things outside which I must attend to, and also there are some letters I should like to dictate."

"Certainly; I'll stay as long as necessary," I replied.

Mr. Hunt had excused me very early several times lately, and I had no thought of doing him a favor by remaining.

It was after five o'clock when he finally came in and threw himself down in his chair, with a half sigh, half laugh.

"You are tired," I ventured, as I waited with pad and pencil.

"A little. The market was pretty wild to-day."

He commenced to dictate. It was nearly six o'clock when the letters were finally finished and I put on my things.

"Miss Andrews, I feel guilty. I did not realize it was so late. Won't you go to Lawton's (a quiet little restaurant near the office), and have a bite of dinner with me? I know that Jennie doesn't give you your dinners and it will be late when you get uptown."

For a moment I hesitated. Then with an impulse I did not try to explain in view of my constant refusal to go out with anyone, I replied:

"Thank you, Mr. Hunt; I shall be glad to go with you to-night."

He said nothing, but I knew by the way his face had lighted up that he was pleased.

We were shown to a quiet table in the back of the room. Just as I sat down I heard a distinct giggle near me. I looked around, and there, almost directly back of us, were Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor. Mr. Hunt had not seen them, and I said very low:

"Mr. Rogers is back of us."

Mr. Hunt flushed with annoyance, then returned carelessly:

"It is a public place. We can't expect to have it all to ourselves."

I felt more than annoyed that I had accepted my employer's invitation; I was angry with myself for not having more strength of purpose. Now Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor would have some reason perhaps to look askance at me whenever Mr. Hunt favored me in any way. I knew there had been talk because of his kindness in allowing me to go so early the days before Jennie's wedding.

But I determined that neither Mr. Hunt nor those two watching us should suspect my annoyance. So I chatted as unconcernedly as I could. Only objecting to an elaborate dinner, because it would take longer to prepare.

Mr. Hunt acceded to my wishes, and we had the plain *table d'hôte* dinner generally served to the patrons of the place. But all the time I was eating I was intensely conscious of the pair back of me; of their unkind comments, which, while I could not hear, I could imagine.

We finished before they did, and when we rose to go, Mr. Hunt deliberately turned around and said:

"Good evening! This is rather a nice place to eat. I am glad to know of it." Then we passed out.

Neither he nor I mentioned the incident. He walked with me to the subway entrance; then, with

the remark that he had something to do in the office, he left me.

I found out later that he returned at once to the café and remained until a late hour, until Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor had gone. He had effectually shown them that I had gone home alone.

When I got home I told Jennie and Jim all about it. I let them see that I was worried because of my yielding to the desire to dine in company, instead of eating alone.

"Them old cats probably are jealous because he didn't ask them!" Jennie said. "Don't you care, Sheila. You ain't any use for 'em anyway; they ain't your kind."

"Jennie's right, Miss Sheila," said Jim. "You done nothing wrong, and don't you worry."

Yet, in spite of all, I lay awake for hours, wishing I had not gone, or that we might have chosen some place where Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor weren't eating.

The next morning I realized that my fears of the interpretation they would put upon my dining with my employer were not unfounded. As I went through the outer office I bowed slightly as usual. I distinctly heard Miss Cantor say to the manager:

"You better be careful to bow to the office pet. If you don't you may lose your job."

My face flushed crimson; so much so that Mr. Hunt looked keenly at me when I spoke to him as usual. I could not tell him of such a speech, and

I realized that Miss Cantor knew I couldn't when she made it. Was I to be subjected to such insults just because for once I sidestepped my iron-clad rule not to dine with men?

I had been so happy. Now I realized that the life of a working girl was a constant struggle against envy, jealousy, and her own natural desires to have companionship.

"It is the last time!" I declared; but as I said it I knew the mischief had been done—that I should pay dearly for that *table d'hôte* dinner taken with my employer because he had kept me working overtime.

Once during the day Mr. Rogers came into the office to consult Mr. Hunt about something. When he found me alone he asked in a tone that in itself was an insult:

"Did you enjoy your dinner last night, Miss Andrews? That's a great little joint for men to sneak to with the girls they employ."

Mr. Hunt came in just then and I was saved the necessity of answering. But my employer sensed something unpleasant, for after Mr. Rogers went out he asked me point blank if he (Rogers) had said anything to me.

"He asked me if I enjoyed my dinner," I replied.

I could not have repeated the last part of the manager's remark to have saved my life.

"I hope you will tell me, Miss Andrews, if anyone annoys you. I would willingly discharge anyone who

did so no matter how valuable in a business way."

The next day I took Jennie's silver down to be marked. When we were discussing just what style lettering to have, Jennie remarked:

"I want them marked 'J. W.' That's for Jim and me both."

"But, Jennie, the silver is always marked with the bride's initials. You should have it marked 'J. M.'"

"I won't have none of that nonsense! Didn't the minister say we was one. It looks like I was that one when you have all that stuff marked with the name I had before I married Jim. I ain't so awful proud of that old name noways. I told you my dad didn't amount to a hill of beans."

Jim joined with me in wanting the silver marked for Jennie. But she was obdurate. "J. W." it was to be marked, or it wouldn't be marked at all. So, finally, Jim and I gave in, and I promised to have it done as she wished.

I spent my noon hour at the silversmith's and had no time for luncheon, so I bought an apple on my way back to the office.

About two o'clock I had a little time and ate my apple. Mr. Hunt came in and said with a smile:

"That looks as if you hadn't eaten enough luncheon."

"I didn't eat any," I told him. "I took Jennie's silver to be marked, and it used up the entire noon hour."

Then I told him of Jennie's insistence that the

silver should be marked for Jim as well as her, and her remark about being the "one"; he laughed heartily and replied:

"That girl is an absolute cure for the blues. I do not wonder you want to live with her. She is very original."

Then he touched the bell and said to the boy who answered:

"Go over to Lawsons' and bring a pot of tea, some toast and chops to Miss Andrews. Be sure the toast is made fresh, and that you get everything here while it is hot."

"Really, Mr. Hunt, I didn't need any luncheon; this apple would have done nicely until dinner time," I said after the boy had gone.

"Allow me to be the judge of that," he said so kindly that I made no further objection.

When the luncheon came he left me alone after telling me to eat it at once while it was hot.

I had scarcely poured my tea when the door opened and Miss Cantor came in. She made no pretense of disguising her dislike and said, after I told her Mr. Hunt was out:

"He hasn't neglected you, has he? It must be nice to be the boss's pet."

I did not reply, but after she had gone the tears came into my eyes. I brushed them quickly away, because I knew that if Mr. Hunt came in he would insist upon knowing what had caused me to cry.

When he came in I had finished my luncheon and

was busily at work. I was amused to see him lift the napkin which covered the tray and look beneath to see if I had eaten what he had provided.

"I made a mistake, the apple would not have satisfied me," I told him laughingly. I had eaten everything he had ordered.

"I'm glad you were sensible," he replied.

That night I told Jennie and Jim of the added insult, not to make them unhappy, but it always helped me to bear things after Jennie had expressed her quaint philosophy concerning them.

"So it's a pet she called you! Well, I'll bet a week of Jim's salary no one ever will call her anybody's pet!" Jennie said, while Jim asked:

"What's the matter with betting your own salary, Jennie?" at which we all laughed. And then I told them I had made up my mind to avoid all notice of their insults and to pretend I didn't hear when it was possible.

"That's right, Sheila! it only tickles 'em if they make you mad enough to answer back. You'll make 'em as glad as if they had run a nail into their feet if you pretend not to notice."

"I don't know, Jennie," Jim broke in. "I think I'd be inclined to tell them to mind their own business."

"Now, see here, Jim Watson, if you go through your life paying attention to all the things jealous, cranky people say, you'll live and die behind a counter instead of having a store of your own. People what

get on don't have no time to be fussing about what folks think about 'em. Sheila's right! If she works hard and lets meddlers alone she'll beat 'em to it."

I adhered strictly to my resolution to work hard, attend to my own business, and not pay any attention to the slurs of anyone in the office who disliked me.

Mr. Hunt had asked me to go to the theatre with him, and seemed hurt when I refused.

"It will do you good," he said to me.

"Thank you, Mr. Hunt, but really I cannot go, and—please do not ask me again. I am resolved not to accept any invitations of any sort—excepting from Jim and Jennie," I added.

"Resolutions are made to be broken," he returned, but I shook my head, and he said no more.

It was hard to refuse him. The longer I worked for him the better I liked him. Then, too, he was a most attractive man physically and mentally. I loved the theatre, and it would have been a joy to go with a man who was capable of understanding and discussing the subtleties of the drama with me.

"I haven't made my party call on your friends yet," he resumed after a moment. "Will you find out if it will be convenient if I come up to-morrow evening?"

"Indeed I will, though I am quite sure they are not going out."

Jennie was delighted when I told her he wanted to come up. Jim, too, was pleased, though, as usual with him, he said but little.

"What'll we have to treat him with?" Jennie asked. "Lemonade and cake like Mrs. Murphy?"

"Suppose we have a Welsh rarebit?" I suggested.

"That's better, Jennie," Jim said. "A man like that Mr. Hunt ain't got much use for lemonade."

"Oh, but you should have seen him drink it that Sunday he met Mrs. Murphy and me out walking and took us home! I think he drank three glasses."

"I'll bet he did it to please Mrs. Murphy," Jennie said, and as I had thought so too I let it go at that.

"I'll get a pitcher of beer, or buy a half dozen bottles," Jim told us, interested in having the little treat a success. "If you want anything else, Miss Sheila, just say so."

"No, indeed, that will be plenty!"

"Ain't it just grand that the silver came back to-day. It's all marked lovely. 'J. W.' in the prettiest letters you ever saw," Jennie broke in. "Come and look at it, Sheila."

I followed Jennie into the dining room.

"Jim's so tickled he don't know what to do because I had them marked this way. I knew he would be."

"I don't blame him," I returned, "but, Jennie, I imagine it isn't all because of the way the silver is marked, I think it is partly your unselfish thought of him which pleases him."

"Why shouldn't I think of him? He's my man, ain't he? If I hadn't meant to be a good wife, and do all I could to make him happy, I wouldn't have

married him. I can't see no fun in running double unless you both are doing all you can. 'Tain't fair for one to do it all. You know, Sheila, Jim's so kind and good it scares me sometimes. He never gets mad and spits out the way I do. It makes me ashamed of my nasty temper."

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Jennie. So it is decided that we have the rarebit, is it? I'll stop and get the cheese on my way up tomorrow night. It must be just right to make a good rarebit."

"All right; and I'll hurry home and get the table fixed, and Jim and me'll get dressed up. Will I use the big tablecloth Mr. Arnold give me?"

"Let me see: how would you like to use part of those pretty napkins as doylies? It would look more informal than the tablecloth, and I think the table would be more attractive."

"That would be lovely! Let's try 'em now and see how they look!" Jennie exclaimed, running to get them and bringing Jim back with her to get his opinion also.

I spread them on the table, which was nicely polished. They looked very pretty, and both Jim and Jennie voted to use them instead of the cloth.

The next day I was filled with a pleasurable anticipation. Several times I called myself severely to task for allowing Mr. Hunt's proposed call upon Jennie to engage my attention so much. But to have him spend an evening with us, to fuss for him, even though

it was only to make a rarebit, gave me an enormous amount of satisfaction.

He didn't speak of the coming visit until just before he left for the afternoon, when I said:

"Good-night, Mr. Hunt."

"Not good-night! I shall see you this evening, I hope." I had told him early in the morning that Jennie would be at home and delighted to have him call.

I flushed at his simple remark, then flushed still more to think that I had done so, and that perhaps he had noticed. I liked my employer; but that was no reason I should blush like a schoolgirl because he had said he would see me that evening.

I was not at all in love with Kenneth Hunt; no such thought had once crossed my mind. But he was of my world, and as such appealed to me. If ever the thought that some time I might love a man crossed my mind, the image of Clark Cummings warned me that he still was the one man in the world who had thrilled me; had awakened within me a longing which had endured through all my sorrow, my unhappiness.

I ate an apology for a dinner, then bought the cheese, and got home just as Jim was starting out to meet me. Jennie, unused to "company," had become nervous for fear I should forget the cheese.

"Why, Jim!" I exclaimed, when he told me. "You don't suppose I could forget when it is our very first party, do you?"

"That's what I said to Jennie; but she's that nervous and excited that nothing would do but that I must come for you."

"Well, now that you have, suppose we run around to that little florist shop and see if it is open. We'll get a few flowers for the table."

It was open, and I bought some lovely pink carnations. It was late, and I only paid fifty cents a dozen for them.

"Where have you two been?" Jennie demanded when we went in, pretending to be jealous. "I thought you had eloped."

"If I were going to elope with anyone it would be with Jim," I told her.

I unwrapped the cheese and grated it, while Jim filled the bowl for the flowers.

"Get your own man; don't be a-stealing mine!" she snorted, then hurried Jim away to dress. "Be sure and put on your white vest. What you going to wear, Sheila?"

"My gray crêpe," I told her.

"That's the prettiest dress you got only that silver one you wore with that Chicago beau of yours, and I suppose that's too dressed up for here."

"Yes, indeed! Now hurry and get dressed, Jennie. You're the hostess, you know. And it never would do for you not to be ready to receive him."

"All right, Sheila! Say, do you know if you stay with me long enough I'll be a regular Fifth Avenue swell." Amid laughter we both started to dress.

As I faced my mirror I felt dissatisfied, and sensed vaguely that I looked ages older than I had a few months before. With the same guilty feeling I always had when dad was alive, I put a little rouge on my cheeks, then dusted them with powder. I looked better, less worn, I thought, as I heard the bell ring.

"Sheila, Mr. Hunt's come!" called Jennie. And I ran out to greet my employer.

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Hunt had brought Jennie some wonderful American Beauty roses, over which she was exclaiming delightedly while he divested himself of his coat and hat. He had worn a dinner coat in honor of the occasion, and looked so thoroughly the well-groomed man of society I felt my heart sink when I thought of the simple preparations we had made for his entertainment.

But Jennie was a host in herself. I had taught both her and Jim to play a fairly good game of bridge, and after she had arranged her flowers and we had chatted a few minutes, she said:

"My Jim ain't much of a talker, Mr. Hunt—what do you say to playing bridge? He don't have to talk then."

"That's a good suggestion. I'm very fond of bridge, though I play an indifferent game," he returned.

So Jennie cleared off the living-room table and we started a game. Jim and I playing opposite Jennie and Mr. Hunt.

I never have enjoyed a game of bridge more in my life. Mr. Hunt, as he had said, played only a fair game, and so we were very evenly matched. We

played until about ten o'clock, when I excused myself and asked Jim to come along with me.

"Bring Mr. Hunt out in a moment," I told Jennie. Then I said to him: "I am going to attempt a rarebit for you, Mr. Hunt. But it is a long time since I made one, and it may not be very good."

But it was, and I felt it deserved all the nice things Mr. Hunt said. After he had complimented me on the rarebit he praised Jennie's table, and altogether was so charming and yet so simple that even Jim warmed up and became quite loquacious—for him.

Jennie called his attention to the silver.

"I want to thank you again for it," she said modestly. "It seems almost as if we had another present now that it is marked."

I was proud of Jennie that night. No society hostess could have shown more real hospitality, more charm, than did this plain, uneducated waitress. Jim, too, appeared to good advantage. I was happy and light-hearted. It seemed as if months of unhappiness dropped from me. When Mr. Hunt finally left us it was after eleven.

"I want to thank you for a delightful evening," he said to Jennie, "and ask you to invite me to come again. Will you?"

"You just come whenever you want to. We'll be glad to see you, won't we, Sheila?"

I mumbled "Yes," blushing furiously. Then, to complete my embarrassment, Mr. Hunt bent his eyes upon me and asked:

"Will you?"

I nodded and said something to Jim. But I could not mistake his meaning, nor—his look.

"Say, Sheila, that rarebit was a jim-dandy! I don't wonder he wanted to come again."

"I miss my guess if it was the rarebit what made him want to come again," Jim replied, and Jennie could not coax him to explain his cryptic remark.

We cleaned up the dishes, then went to bed. But I lay awake for a long time, thinking about Kenneth Hunt. Then, before I finally closed my eyes, Clark Cummings's image came before me, and I went to sleep with a longing to see once more the man who had so taken possession of my girlish fancy.

A few days after Mr. Hunt's call he asked me to wait a little while after the others left. Supposing, of course, that he had some extra work to do, I gladly acquiesced.

"I do not want you to work, Miss Andrews—Sheila, I want to talk to you. You know little about me, you have kept our relations so entirely on a business basis. But, Sheila, I love you. Do you think—oh, Sheila," he exclaimed in a more natural manner, "will you be my wife?"

I had tried to stop him when I realized what he was going to tell me, but could not. And now that he had started he would not stop, although I begged him to.

Suddenly I recoiled. The thought of Clark Cum-

mings had shocked me into something like my normal poise.

"Don't please! Please don't say any more—now."

"Very well. I will take you to the subway; it is late."

"No, let me go alone," I pleaded.

He said no more, but helped me on with my coat.

"I shall not give you up, Sheila. Can't you care for me?" he asked gently. Then he drew me to him and kissed me on the forehead.

"Oh, don't!" I panted, struggling away from him. "You have no right, and——"

Suddenly his arms dropped to his sides, and he let me go.

"Forgive me, dear," he said very humbly. "I will not offend again until you tell me that you will marry me. But you will try to love me, Sheila? You won't let this make any difference, will you, dear? I haven't driven you away by showing my love?"

"I have no place to go," I returned, trying to smile, but my lips trembled, and I felt the tears very near.

"Thank God, you will stay!" he replied. "I don't think I could bear it if you left because of my lack of control." And after again assuring me that I should find no difference in his actions, if only I would remain, he opened the door and I went out.

During the days that followed I felt as if I must have imagined the events of the day on which my employer had told me that he loved me.

Everything seemed just as it had been before. Per-

haps it would be more truthful to say that everything was even made more agreeable for me than before it happened. I think Kenneth Hunt was more careful to make things pleasant for me, to arrange my contact with the other employees so that it would make matters easier for me.

The better I knew Kenneth Hunt the better I liked him. His ideals were high, his standards fine. He was young, ambitious, rich. I valued his friendship very highly, while I told myself I never could care for him in the way he wished.

Then as he did not once recur to the subject I allowed myself to slip back into the old comfortable feeling when with him. I grew more and more absorbed in my work, more and more interested in studying everything connected with it. I was not sensibly very happy, but I was too busy to be unhappy.

I had paid the shorthand school all I owed them and would soon be able to reclaim the ring I still had in the pawnshop. I had paid the interest and it would not take me long to save enough to take out the ring. I would get Mrs. Murphy to go with me. I still had the shrinking feeling about going to a pawnshop I had experienced that day when I walked around the block trying to get courage to go in.

I had not forgotten my plan to have mother come on and keep house for me; first I must not only be free of debt, but have a little ahead. I had experienced the callousness of a big city toward one who was helpless; and I had learned the hard lesson that

everyone has to learn situated as I was. That a little money is a necessity if you are to give of yourself to others.

For several weeks things went on much as usual. Mr. Hunt had kept his word, and neither by word nor look did he let me see any change in his manner toward me. Mr. Rogers and Miss Cantor still sneered occasionally, but not so openly. I paid absolutely no attention to their remarks. Aside from saying good-morning and good-night, when I was obliged to pass them, I held no conversation with either save on strictly business matters.

That my Nemesis was waiting to strike me another blow I had not the slightest warning. I think it is often like that. When we feel surest, safest, then something happens.

One morning as I came into the office, I noticed a girl talking to Mr. Rogers. Some one seeking a position, I thought, and gave her another glance. Something about her was vaguely familiar, yet I was positive I did not know her.

Unfortunately for me, Mr. Hunt was in Boston that day, so I was alone in the office. A little before the luncheon hour Mr. Rogers came in accompanied by the girl. He asked some inconsequential question, and the girl just stood and stared at me. I replied politely to Mr. Rogers, and paid no attention to the girl, though I felt myself flushing. I could not doubt that in some way Mr. Rogers was trying to humiliate me; how, I could not imagine.

When I went out to luncheon I noticed the girl had evidently been hired. She was sitting at the switchboard in the customers' room. The door was open and she almost leered at me as I passed. I can think of no other word which expresses the way she looked at me.

Where had I seen her before, and what had been the manager's object in bringing her in to look at me? These questions became so insistent; the vague impression that I had seen her before was so strong that it quite took away any appetite I might have had for my luncheon. I spent the hour therefore in walking, and wishing that Mr. Hunt were back. I felt there was something brewing; something which was going to prove unpleasant for me.

On my way back to the office I wandered into Old Trinity. The restfulness of the old church soothed me, and when I finally reached the office I was able to smile at my fears; to scold myself roundly for the foolish idea which had taken possession of me. I had no reason to worry over what anyone could say or do, I thought; I had done my work satisfactorily. Each day I was given added responsibilities, made to understand that at last I was a valuable asset to the firm. And this without regard to Kenneth Hunt's friendship for me.

The older brother had occasionally asked me to do some extra and particular work for him. Especially in connection with the customers who traded in cotton.

The elder Mr. Hunt's sending for me naturally did not tend to increase my popularity with Miss Cantor, who was his private stenographer.

When I passed through the outer office on my way in after my noonday walk the new girl was there. She looked at me in such an insolent manner, standing directly in the way when I attempted to pass her, and never stirring from her position, so compelling me to make a slight detour, that I couldn't help feeling there was something back of it all, some reason for her insolence.

My cheeks flamed, but I said nothing, though sorely tempted.

When I attacked my work again I found some interesting matter connected with the cotton market and was soon entirely absorbed in the reports, etc. About four o'clock Mr. Rogers came into the room. I was just finishing up for the day.

"Mr. Hunt wishes to see you at once," he said.

"Very well," I replied, taking up notebook and pencil. I was surprised that Mr. Hunt, Sr., should send for me, especially so late in the day. He usually went home as soon as the market closed.

When I opened the door in response to his "Come in," I was astonished to see Mr. Rogers and the new girl with him.

"Miss Andrews, I have just been informed of something which seems so preposterous to me that I can scarcely believe it. Were my brother at home I should have referred it to him; but in his absence I

feel it is my duty to get at the bottom of the thing at once. Sit down, please."

I looked from one to the other in surprise as I took the seat he had indicated—one where he could look directly at me. What did it all mean? Again the feeling that I had seen the insolent-looking girl before came over me.

"Did you ever work in Bank's department store?" Mr. Hunt asked.

Then I knew! This girl who now looked at me with a malicious smile was the one who had been jealous of the unwelcome attention the floorwalker gave me. It had all happened so long ago, I had put so completely out of my mind everything connected with that awful episode that, in spite of myself, I started. I felt the hot blood rush to my face.

"Yes, Mr. Hunt. I worked there a short time when I first came to New York," I answered, compelling myself to meet his eyes.

"Did you ever see this young lady there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you have any trouble with her? Has she any reason to dislike you—personal reason, I mean?" Then before I could answer the girl broke in:

"I ain't nothing against her, sir; only I think people ought to know she's a——"

"That will do," Mr. Hunt said severely. "I didn't ask your opinion. You didn't answer my question, Miss Andrews."

"I know of no reason why she should have disliked

me, Mr. Hunt, save that she and the other girls resented the fact that the floorwalker tried to show me more attention than he did them."

"Tried! What do you mean?"

"That his presence even was distasteful to me; his offered attentions unbearable."

I was unable to keep the loathing I had always felt for the man out of my voice, but doing my utmost to speak calmly.

"Um"—was the only answer Mr. Hunt made. But a certain something, it might have been that I suddenly became desperate, I couldn't explain the impulse which led me to ask:

"May I tell you something, Mr. Hunt?"

"Yes; go on."

"When I came to New York I had no experience, no references and very little money. I looked for work until my money was gone, then in desperation I took that place at the notion counter. I had no clothes suitable—they were all too good, all of fashionable, expensive material and stylish cut. I would, oh, so gladly, have worn plainer, simpler ones could I have afforded to buy them. But I had no money."

"Where did you get these fine clothes you tell about?" he interrupted, and I couldn't help but see the look of joy pass between the girl and the manager. I had forgotten that this member of the firm knew absolutely nothing about me.

"My father was supposed to be very wealthy. He

was a Board of Trade man. When he died his affairs were very much involved, and we had nothing, not even a home. Nothing but clothes."

"I see; go on," he said again.

"The girls at the notion counter were all jealous of me—of my clothes, rather. They showed it from the start. I tried to be friendly, to be fair; but it was no use. They had made up their minds to dislike me. That is all."

"You say that is all," Mr. Hunt remarked. "Why did you leave the store?"

"I was discharged."

Now that I knew what I had to face I grew faint and sick. Everything in the office turned black, and for a moment I closed my eyes. This awful thing which I had forgotten even to dread, had at last hunted me out. Was I never to have peace?

When next Mr. Hunt spoke his voice sounded strange and thin, as though he were speaking from a distance.

"What for?"

"They said I—stole."

I whispered the last work. I could not say it aloud. Even so, I heard a sniff from the girl, a grunt of satisfaction from the manager.

"Did you?"

The suddenness, the unexpectedness of the question, startled me into a sort of desperate self-possession.

"No, sir, I did not!" I answered as emphatically as he had spoken.

"Did they discharge you without proof?" he next asked.

I saw that he was determined to probe the matter to the bottom. And it pleased me—that is, if anything could please me under the circumstances.

"Yes, sir. That is, they claimed that little things had been missing ever since the day I took the position, and the other girls demanded my discharge to protect themselves."

I could not help the bitterness which now crept into my voice at the thought of what I had endured.

"Did they search you?" Mr. Hunt next asked, but I noted a change, though it was slight, in his voice, and took courage.

"No, I offered to let them. I even told the man who discharged me to go to the rooming house where I lived and examine my trunks."

"They made no effort to prove their assertions?"

"Not the slightest."

"You may go, Rogers; take that young lady with you. I will talk to Miss Andrews a moment longer."

"Very well, sir," Rogers answered, "I felt it my duty——"

"Yes—I understand," and with a motion he dismissed the manager and his companion.

"Now, Miss Andrews, you will realize that I am in a very delicate position. Kenneth, my brother, will not return for two or three days. Had this girl brought proofs of your guilt, had you not so frankly stated your case, I should have felt bound to dis-

charge you. But in the absence of proof of any kind I am not disposed to take any such drastic measures. Kenneth must hear the story and decide what is best. Frankly, I shall be sorry to lose you. You have become quite valuable lately, and I, the firm, appreciate an employee who proves his or her interest by their work. I would suggest, however, that you take a little vacation until my brother returns."

Then, as he saw the distress I felt at this tacit acknowledgment of his belief in my guilt, he went on: "I will attend to the matter in person. You need feel no delicacy about either taking the vacation or about returning to us if my brother so decides."

There was nothing for me to do but thank him and accept his terms. To my surprise when I rose he did also, and said:

"Wait a moment. I will go out with you."

Mr. Rogers and the new girl were in close conversation when we passed them.

"Miss Cantor will do whatever is necessary to-morrow, Rogers," Mr. Hunt paused to remark. "Miss Andrews has asked to be relieved from her duties until my brother can return and investigate this false charge against her. I myself am satisfied of her innocence. I shall ask you and this young person not to mention the affair. Should I hear of it I shall know where the report started."

"Oh, thank you," I exclaimed, when we had reached the hall. "You have been very kind to me."

"My little prevarication won't hurt any one, and it will make things easier for you," he said, smiling down at me.

We rode down in the elevator together, and as I started toward the entrance to the street he said as he put out his hand:

"I have faith that you can clear yourself."

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Hunt had said he was sure I could clear myself of the unjust charge against me, but how? It had been so long ago that the awful thing had happened and every one connected with the affair had seemed so positive of my guilt. How in the world should I go about proving my innocence?

Where had Mr. Rogers found that girl? I remembered her as the one at an opposite counter who had glared at me whenever that odious floorwalker spoke to me. I felt as if the hand of the whole world were against me; and once the thought of running back to Chicago and marrying Bob occurred to me. But I dismissed the idea with an impatient shrug. Was I so weak as to do such a thing to save myself when I knew I was innocent of any wrong?

But I thought, sadly, that my happy days at the office were over. That I never could go back.

"Where are you, Sheila?" I heard Jennie call, and quietly I unlocked the door before I answered:

"In here, Jennie, why?"

"Oh, nothing, I just wanted to know if you were home!" she answered, in her happy voice. "What you sitting in the dark for?"

"Just thinking," I replied, as she came to the door and in her impetuous way switched on the lights.

"Just thinking!" she repeated, sarcastically. "What you been crying about, Sheila Andrews? You can't fool little Jennie."

"Oh, nothing—that is——" and here I broke down and again sobbed wildly.

Jennie came over to me and put her arms around me.

"Have you had any dinner?" she asked.

"No—I couldn't eat."

"Jim, put on the kettle; I want to make Sheila a cup of tea," she called. "My, but your face is hot, and your hands, too. You're sick. That's what's the matter. I'm going to undress you and put you straight to bed, and, if you ain't all right in the morning, I'll just send word that you won't be down."

I surrendered gladly to Jennie's ministrations. I soon stopped sobbing and lay quietly while she went for the tea.

When she returned with it I tried to drink it to please her, but I could not. There was a lump in my throat so large I had to beg her to take the cup away.

"Not until you tell me what's the matter. I'm a regular Sherlock Holmes, Sheila, and I know something's gone wrong and it has made you sick."

"I am ashamed to tell you, Jennie," I moaned. "Had I not been I should have told you long ago."

"Ashamed to tell me!" Jennie repeated as she sat

down beside the bed. "Why, Sheila, I thought you loved me."

"I do, Jennie, I do!" I sobbed again. "That is why I am so ashamed to have you know."

"There, dear, don't cry, but just go ahead and tell me all about it. How do you know I can't straighten it out for you?"

"Oh, if you could!" I returned, then without waiting I sobbed out the whole miserable story, beginning with the day I went into the store up to that very afternoon when I was accused in the office by the new girl Mr. Rogers had hired.

Jennie never spoke until I had finished, although several snorts and impatient sniffs had told me of her indignation. It was wonderful how the telling her relieved me. I ceased to sob, and could even coax up a smile at her evident distress and anger. Distress for me; anger at all the others.

"I wonder where that Rogers man found that girl," she said finally. "It looks like a put up job to me."

"No, she was from the store all right. It is just fate, Jennie, my fate."

"If that Mr. Hunt, your boss I mean, had only been there."

"That is fate, too, Jennie. Of course he will have to know all about it now. I am thankful I won't see his face when they tell him."

"He won't believe that rotten lie no more'n I do!" she declared, "and you know he won't!"

I hoped he wouldn't, but how was I to be sure that

he would believe me innocent unless I could prove it; and how was I to prove anything?

"It was decent in the old man to treat you so good," she said after awhile; "he doesn't believe you done it, I'll bet."

"I don't know, Jennie. He was kind, but why should he have proposed I remain at home if he was sure of my innocence?"

"To save you being bothered by them rotten office people till your own boss got back to tend to them," she replied spiritedly. "You're too sick to go back anyway. I'm going to bathe your face and hands. They are burning up, then you go to sleep and let me think what is to be done about it."

I must have gone directly to sleep as soon as Jennie left me; when I wakened the house was dark, and I knew that both she and Jim had gone to bed. I lay tossing from side to side for an hour, then I crept out into the kitchen to get a drink.

"Is that you, Sheila?" Jennie called.

"Yes. I was thirsty."

"Now you get straight back to bed. If you want anything just yell for it. You ain't fit to be left alone, and if you ain't better in the morning I am going to send Jim for a doctor."

"You'll do no such thing," I replied, just as I passed the mirror. I recoiled when I saw my crimson cheeks and eyes bright with fever.

"You see, you are sick," Jennie, who had been watching me, said as she helped me into bed.

Quickly again I dozed off, but this time I did not sleep save for a few moments at a time. I would waken with a start as I lived over the events of the day; or those of that terrible day long past when I was so falsely accused.

I was better in the morning, but felt weak and languid. Jennie brought me a dainty breakfast, and made me promise I would remain in bed. I willingly promised when she declared she would not go to work until I did. Jim was to run up at noon to see if he could do anything for me, and also to see if I had grown feverish again.

"If she has, you send for the doctor P. D. Q.," Jennie told him. "Then let me know, and I'll come right home."

I remained in bed all that day and until noon on Saturday. This was partly due to Jennie's insistence, partly to the terrible lassitude I felt, and the unwillingness to talk even to Jim.

Late Saturday afternoon Jennie said:

"You don't mind us going out a spell, do you, Sheila?"

"No, indeed," I replied, rather glad than otherwise to be left alone in my misery.

"We won't be gone long," she replied as she kissed me, "and don't worry, Sheila, it will all come out right—some way."

It was about seven o'clock when they returned. Jennie was pleased over something, I saw at a glance, but I was in no mood to ask questions, and

she volunteered no information. Jim, too, seemed in unusually good spirits, and said as he bade me good-night:

"Don't you fret, Miss Sheila. Nobody who knows you will believe a word of that nonsense."

"Thank you, Jim," I replied, but I did not share his confidence.

Sunday dawned bright, beautiful. A lovely winter day. But there was no brightness in my soul, nothing but despair. Mr. Hunt had said he was sure I could prove my innocence. And I had done nothing in any way to establish my innocence.

All day I sat in my room. When I refused to go out to dinner with Jim and Jennie, they proposed to remain at home with me. Finally I persuaded them to go without me. I wanted to be alone.

When they had gone, after preparing me a delicious dinner and serving it to me on a tray, attempting to cheer me up while doing so, I once more reviewed the whole affair. I could see no hope of ever clearing the matter up. It meant that I would once more have to start all over again. And the first bit of satisfaction I had felt came with the thought that now I was at least better equipped to fight my way than before. But fast on the heels of this thought came another. I could not tell why I had left Hunt & Hunt any more than I could tell why I had left Bank's department store.

Yielding to Jennie's coaxing, I sat in the living room with them after they returned from their din-

ner. About eight o'clock the bell rang. Jim went to the door, and, before I could escape, he was back in the room, followed by Kenneth Hunt.

My heart stood still as he came over to me, and, taking both my hands in his, said gently in a voice which quivered with pity:

"You poor child!" Then, as the tears started, "You have been ill, too."

"Yes, I have been ill," I replied, glad of an excuse for my weakness. "I should be in bed now," and I rose as if to leave them.

He forced me gently back into my chair.

"Wait a moment, Miss Andrews," and he seated himself beside me, still holding one of my hands in his firm, strong clasp. "I know all that has happened, and I came up at once to tell you how sorry I am that such an injustice should have been done you in my office while you were in my employ."

"But, Mr. Hunt, you don't know! I can't prove that——"

"Hush! I don't need any proof, Sheila."

"Ain't that just what I told you?" Jennie interrupted.

"But I can't go back until I am cleared. I won't!" I declared.

I am sure I do not know what I expected Kenneth Hunt to say when I told him I wouldn't go back until I was cleared of the terrible charge hanging over me. To my surprise he agreed with me.

"I wouldn't have you go," he quietly returned.

"The situation would be unbearable—for you."

"But what can I do? How prove anything? And if I am not proven innocent, they will think me guilty," I replied, almost distracted over the affair, and weak from my short illness.

"Leave that to your friends," he smiled, "and you take the vacation you evidently so much need while we attend to it."

"That's the way to talk!" Jennie broke in, "and I'm going to help, Mr. Hunt. Jim and me went down there late yesterday afternoon. There's a girl there I used to know a little, I done something for her once. She's coming to see me Monday night after the store closes. But Jim and me don't believe no such trash about Sheila, do we, Jim?" Jim astonished me by replying:

"No, indeed, we don't!" with more spirit than I had ever observed in him. "And we don't need no department store girl to prove it to us neither. But if it will make Miss Sheila happier, I'm willing to listen to her and see if what she tells us will be any use."

"Thank you, Jim," I replied. "It is good of you to believe in me when I can prove nothing."

"Bosh!" Jennie sniffed. "I'd leave him to-morrow if he dared to even think you done anything you hadn't ought to, let alone talk about it!"

We all laughed; we couldn't help it. Jennie's expression was so belligerent. The laugh did me good, and until Mr. Hunt left we did not mention the affair

again. But just as he bade me "good-night," he said:

"Please do not worry and make yourself ill. It will all come out right, and very quickly. Trust me, won't you?" he asked so low none but I heard.

"I do and will!" I replied. "I never can repay you for your kindness."

"Perhaps you can—some day," he answered, with a meaning I could not ignore.

After he had gone Jim, Jennie and I sat talking of him, his goodness and my troubles.

"The girl I told you about fell in love with a man who promised to marry her and then she found out he was married already—when it was too late. Poor thing! I took care of her—I mean helped her pay her way in hospital. The baby died, but she didn't want to come back into the restaurant, so got a job in that store. You see, some of the girls knew and she was ashamed. If you had told me about this stealing affair when I first got to know you I'll bet I could have straightened it out then. I don't see why you didn't."

"I was so ashamed, Jennie."

"But after we got to be pals you might have told me."

"I know. I thought of it many times, but it was so degrading to speak of such a thing to you, Jennie. I think I could have told Jim easier."

"Huh!" Jennie sniffed. "I like that! Well, we both know it now, and you just leave it to us. Some

way we'll get the truth out of that bunch. If we don't Mr. Hunt will. Now, you go to bed. You'll be sick again if you don't."

Obediently I did as I was told. I slept soundly all night. My last waking thought was that in some way I was to be vindicated and forever rid of the fear that this awful charge against me might at any moment come up to destroy my peace and happiness.

The little story of the restaurant girl and Jennie's interest and helpfulness came to me as I worked. What a beautiful character was hers. She had told the pathetic little story so simply, had hurried over her own part so quickly, that one scarcely realized the part she had played.

In spite of my unusual domestic duties the day dragged dreadfully. I was all finished by one o'clock.

Finally I dressed and went out for a walk. Then I wondered why I had not thought of it before. I would call upon Mrs. Murphy. Her quaint philosophy always entertained and amused me.

"It's good for sore eyes to see you," she said to me. "Come right in the parlor and sit down. I'll be back in a minute."

"May I come into the dining room with you?" I asked. The door had been left ajar, and I saw that she was looking over the berries for dinner. "I will help you," I added.

"What you doing home this time of day?" she queried as we sat before the bowl heaped with fruit.

"You ain't lost your job?" real concern in her voice.

"No, indeed," I hastened to assure her, "but I had a little sick spell—only a day or two—and Mr. Hunt has given me a short vacation."

"They are mighty good to you down there, ain't they?"

"Too good. I do not deserve so much consideration," I replied as I held up my stained fingers to show her.

"Don't hold the berries so tight; then you won't get mussed up so."

"But I like it. Look how crinkly the tips of my fingers are."

"If you had hulled as many berries as I have your fingers wouldn't be soft enough to crinkle," she laughed, as she showed me her calloused hands, from off which the juice ran, leaving scarcely a trace.

"I wish you would tell me something about yourself, Mrs. Murphy," I begged. "How long has Mr. Murphy been dead? Did you ever have any children?"

"One question at a time, Miss Sheila! There ain't nothing to tell about myself. I just live along, doing my duty as I see it. My man died about ten years ago." She wiped away a tear. "He was a good man according to his lights, or I wouldn't have hung his picture in the parlor. He liked a drop of liquor once in a while; but show me the Irishman who don't. I

never done no work only for ourselves when he was alive. He was a carpenter, and a good one. But he couldn't keep no money. It slipped through his fingers faster than he got it, so when he was buried—I gave him a fine funeral—there wasn't anything left. As I knew how to cook, I started a boarding house. It's hard work, but it's honest."

She waited some time before she spoke again, and finally she said:

"Yes, Miss Sheila, I had two boys. Twins. Their pa was that proud of 'em, too. Every Sunday morning he used to take them to the park while I did up the house. When they was babies he took them in the carriage he had bought for them. It was the swellest carriage you ever seen. It was made for twins. I couldn't push it to save my life, but Tim, that's Murphy, was always wanting to show the boys off. Then when they got big enough to walk he would dress 'em all up and take a hand of each of 'em, and off they'd go, and I'd not see any of 'em for hours. There was an epidemic of diphtheria the year they was five. They're both in one grave. I'll show you their pictures some day. I keep them in the bureau. Someway I couldn't work if I had them where I could see their little faces all the time. That's all, Miss Sheila. We never had no more babies. Tim took to drink pretty bad after that, and didn't live long. But I never blamed him much. He just couldn't stand it without his boys." When serious Mrs. Murphy had scarcely any brogue.

"Oh, you dear woman!" I exclaimed. "How can you be so brave and cheerful?"

"It would help none if I went around with a long face, would it? And it might make others unhappy. You see, I had the dears for five long years. If they had lived they might have growed up bad or something. I always feel as though I had two little angels waiting for me."

I remained with her until five o'clock. After we finished the berries she took me into the bedroom, and, opening the bureau drawer, she placed a picture in my hands. Two little boys, as alike as the proverbial two peas, gazed up at me from the cardboard. Two little Irish faces whose short life had taught their mother to live so that some day she would be worthy to see them again. My eyes filled as I laid the picture tenderly down. And I wondered if in the higher walks of life—as we are taught to consider them—I should find any truer philosophy and any more faithful tender hearts than I had found in Jennie and Mrs. Murphy.

When I reached home I found a short note from Bob Merrick. He was "still on the job," as he expressed it, and to his own very evident amazement was becoming interested in his work.

"I started this foolishness to please you, Sheila, but by gad, I don't believe I could quit it now and go back to the old lazy life if there were no Sheilas in the world. So don't feel sorry you encouraged me to work. It's great sport earning money."

Dear old Bob. His letter relieved me immensely. I had feared he might think his going to work because I asked him, a reason why I would marry him. I knew now that I should never be his wife.

To my surprise when they came in, Jennie and Jim were not alone. A sweet-faced girl whom I never had seen before was with them.

"Miss Sheila, this is Minnie Rolfe, the girl who works in the same place you did," Jennie said by way of introduction.

My face flushed as I held out my hand. This girl knew I had been accused of being a thief and had been discharged for that reason. I was embarrassed before her.

"I am very glad to meet any of Jennie's friends," I said, as we shook hands.

"Have you got enough dinner for one more, Sheila?" Jennie broke in.

"Of course I have, though Miss Rolfe must be told that I am not much of a cook. I'll put on another plate if you will excuse me."

The dinner was plain but good, and they all ate heartily and praised my cooking. Nothing was said about the reason of Miss Rolfe's visit, yet we were all aware of it. We soon finished, and then Jennie said:

"We'll leave the table stand, Sheila. Minnie has a long ways to go to get home from here and Jim wanted you to talk to her."

It turned out that Minnie had been in the lunch room one day when the girls at the notion counter

were discussing me and how they could get rid of me. They spoke of my clothes, my stuck-up airs, and several other things to which they objected. The way I combed my hair, etc.

"They planned to have the things disappear. I think they were thrown out. The girls were afraid to take them themselves for fear they would be found on them if there was trouble," Minnie told us.

"Did you know any of the girls personally?" I asked.

"No. You see I was never at that counter. I wrapped when I went there first, then I was at the handkerchief counter."

"So it would simply be your word against theirs if they all denied the story you tell," I said.

"That is all, I'm afraid, Miss Sheila. But now that I have seen you I don't see how they could even suspect you."

"Thank you, Minnie. But the unfortunate part of it is they did."

"The fools!" Jennie snorted.

"Can you remember anything else they said about me or have you told us all?" I questioned.

"Oh! they didn't mention your name at all. If Jennie hadn't asked so many questions I never should have remembered even what I told you. I wasn't very happy the time it happened and I didn't pay much attention. I only thought the girls were mean to treat another girl so."

I felt disheartened. All we had was an account of

this girl who had overheard a conversation in which no name entered, and whose own story was perhaps known and would militate against anything she might say.

Jim took Minnie to the subway, and I voiced my fears to Jennie as we cleared the table and washed the dishes.

"Don't you worry; they will have to believe her. If they won't, we'll find some other way," Jennie said.

Just then the bell rang and I was handed a special delivery letter. It was from Kenneth Hunt, and contained only a few words.

"Meet me at Bank's store at ten to-morrow morning. If anything prevents, telephone me by nine-thirty," was the only important paragraph in the letter.

"Look, Jennie!" I exclaimed, "you may read it. Do you suppose he has found out anything?"

"Of course; or he will, if he ain't yet."

Now that my only friends in New York were working with and for me to establish my innocence, I could not brook disappointment. In some way I *must* be shown not guilty of those petty thefts of so long ago.

CHAPTER XV

When Jim came in he, too, had to be told, and for half an hour we speculated upon what might or would happen.

"There's time for a good long sleep before ten o'clock, Sheila," Jennie said, after a time, "and I am so sleepy I don't know what to do."

"Of course you are," I guiltily replied. "You have been up looking after me, and running about attending to my business until you are worn out."

The next morning promptly at ten o'clock I entered the doorway so hateful to me. Kenneth Hunt was there before me and greeted me pleasantly before I noticed the man accompanying him.

"Miss Andrews, this is Mr. Green. I hope he may be of help in clearing up this little matter for you."

As I acknowledged the introduction I realized that my employer had brought a detective with him. A keen, competent looking man.

We went at once to the office of the man who had dismissed me. He treated Mr. Hunt with the utmost deference. To me he nodded superciliously, and to the detective he gave no recognition at all.

I saw that he recognized me. But his manner

made me think that he probably supposed I was in trouble again, and that he was only to be interviewed as to my character.

"Miss Andrews was discharged from your store by you. May I ask why?" Mr. Hunt began.

The manager opened a ponderous book, and, turning a few pages, read:

"Miss Sheila Andrews discharged for theft."

Turning to my employer, he said, graciously:

"That answers your question, Mr. Hunt."

"Was the theft proven?"

"Why—practically, yes. All the other girls had been here some time, and nothing been missed before Miss Andrews came."

"Will you send for a girl named Rolfe, Minnie Rolfe," the detective broke in, consulting a card he held in his hand.

"Certainly, if you wish," but I noted the frown and the change in tone when he spoke. He had been all suavity to Mr. Hunt, but he evidently resented the other's questioning.

In a few moments Minnie came in. I purposely looked the other way and she made no effort to speak to me. She told her story just as she had told it at the flat, and when questioned admitted no names had been mentioned, and that it might have been any one of the girls instead of me.

Then Mr. Hunt insisted that each girl from the notion counter be examined separately. He also asked that Minnie be allowed to remain in the room.

I felt as if I were in court as the questions were flung rapidly at the first girl who came up. The detective had now taken entire control.

Nothing was gained from her. That is, nothing but denials. Then she left, and another girl took her place, one who had stood near me and who had been a little less unkind than the rest.

She broke down entirely under the questioning of the detective and sobbed out the whole miserable story just as Minnie had told it. She completely exonerated me, and the manager signed a paper to that effect. He made all kinds of profuse apologies to Mr. Hunt; yet something told me he was none too pleased to be put in the wrong.

"I should advise you to have proof before you discharge a young girl again," Mr. Hunt said at parting. "You are apt to do some one else an injustice by such arbitrary methods."

I was so happy that I couldn't think of anything but that the stigma on my character was at last removed. Mr. Hunt called a taxi and returned to the office, while I took a long walk before returning home.

"If you feel able you may report for duty to-morrow morning," he said to me as we parted, "but don't come down unless you feel well."

"I shall certainly be there," I had returned. "And I don't know how to thank you for all your goodness."

"Don't mention it; that will please me better than anything you could say."

I could scarcely wait until Jennie and Jim came home to tell them. They were as delighted as I could wish, but not a bit surprised.

"I told you Mr. Hunt would fix it up some way," Jennie said. "I guess you was a kind o' shorn lamb when I met up with you. And God saw you needed me."

"I think He did, Jennie," I replied as I kissed her.

The next morning I was at the office at the usual time. Mr. Rogers gave me a curt nod as I passed him, and Miss Cantor a sneering look; but someway I minded neither. I was so happy at my complete vindication, so light-hearted, that it would take more than sour looks to hurt me.

"Good-morning," Kenneth Hunt said, as I entered his room. "Are you sure you are fit for work again?"

"Not only fit, but hungry for it," I declared.

"You will meet with no reminders of the unpleasant episode," he told me. "The telephone operator has been replaced by another—after she was told the outcome of her gossip. And Mr. Rogers has given me his word never to refer to it again."

Now, for some little time my life was as it had been before. If I noticed any difference it was that I was given more responsibility, treated with more consideration than ever.

But there was one incident I must recall! The elder Mr. Hunt had come into his brother's office the day of my return and most kindly expressed his pleasure at the outcome of the unpleasant affair.

I again took up my studies, especially of financial matters connected with the business of my employer. As before the cotton market fascinated me, and I gave much of my time to the study of conditions which affected it. Occasionally I could give Kenneth Hunt some bit of information which he needed about cotton which seemed to surprise as well as please him. I remember one day he said:

"You'll become a cotton expert if you keep on at this rate."

"I wish I might," I replied. "But I do not aspire to anything so great as that. I would like to understand it thoroughly, however."

"You should take a trip south and look over the cotton belt," he said laughingly. "You know there's nothing like studying a subject on the ground."

"Perhaps I may sometime," I answered, falling in with his light mood, but more than half meaning it just the same. It was a new idea, but why not? I should have a vacation some day, and what would be more interesting than to visit the south in the capacity of a student, instead of a society girl?

Then I thought of my plan to bring mother to New York, and realized that anything so visionary as a vacation in the South must be in the distant future. Jennie would need all the room she had in the flat during the winter. She already was planning to give up her position for the more responsible one of wife and mother combined. She had told Mr. Arnold she must soon leave, and he was inconsolable.

"You'd think I was the only chicken on the fence, to hear him talk," she said to me, not without pride.

"He will miss you, Jennie, and so will the girls," I replied. Many of the girls had been helped in every way by the big-hearted Jennie. She knew all their home troubles and all their love affairs. She was their friend and counsellor as well as their overseer.

"I hope he'll get some one who will watch out for them girls," she said, soberly. "They need a heap of helping along."

"He will," I replied, as I saw how seriously Jennie had taken my remark anent the girls. "He is a very competent man, you know, and also a kind one."

"I don't believe he's ever got over thinking about you, Sheila. He is always asking if you are well, and if you are happy in your work."

"That is only natural, as I once worked for him," I replied. But I could not help blushing a bit, as I thought of that Sunday ride we took with him into the country to buy eggs, etc., for the stores.

What a pity it was that a man like Mr. Arnold couldn't have cared for some nice girl who could have returned his affection. It had always seemed to me that there must be somewhere in the world the right Jill for every Jack; that in some way, somehow, they would find and know each other if only they had patience to wait. But I was beginning to change my mind about this as about many other things. There might be a Jill suited to every Jack, but if they never met, or only met to be parted, what good was it?

Life seemed to me at this time rather a puzzle. Fate appeared to have a good deal to do with my affairs. Things moved along without much change for me, without much to lead me to think they would further improve. I was at a standstill.

I had paid all of my tuition, and had nearly enough to take out the ring I had with the pawnbroker. Then I should save every penny I could toward a home for mother, just a little apartment of three or four rooms where we could be together.

Already I had looked at several I saw advertised, but so far had found nothing which quite suited my taste and my purse. I must not get too far from the office; I wanted a nice neighborhood and a clean house. That was a good deal for one who could at the most afford only twenty-five dollars a month rent. But I felt sure I would be able to find what I wanted by the time I would be ready for mother.

Kenneth Hunt had observed the most politic manner toward me since my return to the office. I was very grateful, and so perhaps more effusive in my manner than was either my wont or the part of wisdom. But it was done innocently, with absolutely no thought of leading Mr. Hunt to think I had changed my mind in any particular as far as he was concerned.

I looked upon Kenneth Hunt only as a kind, thoughtful, and generous employer. It is most difficult to consider a person, his character and his actions, dissociated from his surroundings.

I knew I liked the man; that I was happy in his

employ. How much of this happiness was due to a personal regard for him and how much to the change in my own affairs because of my better position and the interest I had begun to feel in my work I never thought.

I had almost forgotten that he had said he loved me, so surely had he kept the letter of his promise to let all be as it had been before his avowal. As for myself, if I ever thought of leaving him, of working for any one else, I felt a constriction of my heart at the bare possibility.

It was not at all likely that I would ever get another position like this one. I would do all in my power to make myself, my services, necessary; not to win a husband and a home, but to make a home for mother and myself.

The work in the office engrossed me fully. I gave it all my thought, all my strength as well as my time. I looked back at my idle life as a society girl and wondered how it ever satisfied me. I forgot entirely that I had never known anything else, that I had dad and mother, Harold, and a lovely, happy home. I thought of it only as it looked to me now in the light of a broader knowledge, a worker's view of life.

One thing I thought I did realize and that was that never again could I be content to live the life which seemed the part of most women. Never could I be happy if I lost the feeling of independence I now possessed. So I planned to work and study to make of myself a valuable asset in the business world.

The elder Mr. Hunt was not well and while he was away I should have part of his work to attend to also.

In consequence of his absence Kenneth had taken charge of the work usually done in his office, as well as in his own, so that it was impossible to entirely avoid Miss Cantor. But I made no replies to her sneering remarks—though it was hard sometimes to restrain myself. Should I quarrel with her, Kenneth Hunt would find out and she would perhaps lose her position. It would at least put me again in a position where he would defend me. This I was determined to avoid if possible. I was already under such great obligations to him that I would bear almost anything rather than add to them.

Mr. Rogers, too, while not blatantly offensive, showed his resentment in many ways, trifling in themselves, but making me uncomfortable.

I had saved enough to get my ring from the pawnbroker, so one Saturday afternoon I went to the shop and redeemed it.

I stopped at Mrs. Murphy's and showed her my ring. I did not remain, as I wanted to go flat hunting. That was my usual Saturday afternoon pastime.

"I'm that glad, dearie!" she said when I held up my finger so she could see the ring. "I was afraid you'd lose it. Try not to put anything up again, honey, if you can help it. It's hard to work like you do for big interest for them pawnbrokers. If you have to have money again, I've got a tidy bit laid away against a rainy day, and you're welcome to the

loan of it any time. And I don't want no interest, either," she added generously.

I gave her what dad used to call a "bear hug" and went on my way, my heart light because of the kind, faithful friend I had in her.

Sometimes I wondered how mother would get along with these big-hearted plebeian friends of mine. Then I knew when she found out all they had been to me, all they had done for me, she, too, would love them.

That very afternoon I found an apartment which suited me in every particular. It would not be vacated until October, about six weeks away. I would not be ready for mother as soon as that, but I did not dare let the apartment slip through my hands; so I signed a lease for a year, with the privilege of renewal. The agent asked for references, and I gave my employer and Mrs. Murphy. He promised to decorate as I wished, in an inexpensive way, of course, as soon as the present tenants moved out. Then I would furnish it, and before Christmas have mother with me. Perhaps by the middle of November I would be ready for her. I, of course, would move in as soon as it was decorated, and so save what I now paid at Jennie's. But I would not have mother come on until everything was in perfect order.

Strangely enough the apartment was only two blocks from Jennie. After looking all over, I had found something near home. I have found that it is often so. We look vainly for things which are right within our reach.

CHAPTER XVI

"So you have found an apartment?" Mr. Hunt said when I reached the office on Monday.

"Yes, and I took advantage of your offer to use you as reference."

"That was right," he returned. "When will you take possession?"

"About the middle of October. They are going to decorate for me. But I sha'n't send for mother until some time later."

"Why not? Do you need money, Miss Andrews, Sheila? Let me advance you what you need. I——" he stopped suddenly, the door had opened and Rogers stood in the room.

"I knocked, but evidently you didn't hear me," he said quietly. "Mr. Whiting is in the board room and wants to see you."

As he turned to follow Mr. Hunt from the room I knew from the malevolent glance he gave me that he had heard what Mr. Hunt had said anent loaning me money.

Upon Mr. Hunt's return he took up the conversation where he had left off.

"I hope you will not postpone your mother's coming, Sheila, from any foolish sense of independence. If you will be happier to have her with you, do have

her come as soon as it is convenient and let me help you."

"Thank you so much," I returned, determined not to accept any more favors from him. "But I shall be able to send for her as soon as I am ready for her. I want everything particularly nice. She has always been accustomed to nice things and——" I hesitated, embarrassed. I had not meant to say so much.

"I know, and so have you. You are the bravest soul I have ever known. The bravest, and the—dearest," he said very low, but I heard, and could not help the flush which came over my face. "Oh, Sheila, if only"—he stopped suddenly. The passion died out of his voice as he continued, "we will answer this letter of the agent's first of all," and he seated himself as I took my pad and made ready for work.

He wrote a very nice letter, telling the agent I was responsible in every way. Just such a letter as he would have written had I been a man. That night after I went to bed the conversation came back to me, his calling me brave and "dearest." His passionate exclamation. I longed to care for this man enough to marry him. He was all that any sensible girl could wish—and more. Yet even as I held my hands over my burning cheeks at my thoughts, Clark Cummings, as I had known him, came to check the feeling, and I forgot all about Kenneth Hunt in speculating about Clark. Where was he? What was he doing? Had he entirely forgotten me, or did he occasionally recall the happy hours we spent together?

I felt that he must, that the very fact that he was constantly appearing in my thoughts was proof of his continued interest. Then for the first time came the thought:

"Suppose he has married!" I shivered with dread, as I lay there staring up at the ceiling. Why had I never thought of it before? He had had plenty of time to court and marry some girl since I had last seen him. I got up, switched on the light, and found the card with his address on it—the card he had given me when he said that if I ever needed him that would bring him to me.

As I held the card in my hand a great temptation came over me to write Clark, to tell him something of myself, of my different life, and the changed views it had brought about. Then—no, I thought, I will not break the silence. He may be married, and any one of a number of things might have happened which would make it a foolish move on my part. But before I slipped back to bed I pressed the card to my lips.

I spent a restless night, and in the morning made up my mind not to allow myself to think of Clark Cummings again. I opened my trunk and locked the card away. At least it would not prove the temptation it had when in the bureau drawer, and so easily accessible.

In the morning I told Jennie all about the apartment, and both she and Jim agreed to get home early and go with me to look at it.

"Then I'll blow you girls to dinner and a show," Jim announced. His "show" being the ten-cent movie around the corner.

"I'll eat the dinner, Jim," I laughingly replied, "if you will excuse me from the show. I have several letters to write and we are so busy at the office I must get to bed early."

I did not tell them that I had spent sleepless hours the night before.

"All right, Miss Sheila. Shall we meet at the new apartment?"

"Yes; that will make it easy for all of us," I replied.

That night I met Jim and Jennie at the apartment, and the people who occupied it kindly gave me permission to let them see it.

"It is perfectly lovely, Sheila!" Jennie enthused. "And so near us, too!"

Jim, too, admired the plan of the rooms, and both were so interested that it was a pleasure to explain to them just what I intended to do.

"You must let me help you fix up," Jennie said. "I'll soon be at home all day, and can sew and get some of your draperies ready."

Strangely enough, Jennie was a beautiful seamstress. She was so clever with a needle that I often told her she could have earned her living that way.

We had a nice dinner together, and then I left and went home. I wrote a long letter to Harold, telling him of my plans, cautioning him at the same time to

say nothing to mother. I intended to surprise her.

The next day, during a lull in business, Kenneth Hunt came over to my desk and said:

"You are doing such good work, so much of it, that I have decided to give you thirty-five dollars a week hereafter. Don't thank me," as I started to speak. "You earn every cent of it. Besides, the help you have been in our cotton deals is worth something."

I thanked him as well as I was able. However, I knew perfectly well that he had raised me at this time because of my desire to have mother with me as soon as possible and because of the flat. Yet I could not without embarrassment permit him to realize that I understood. So I determined to work harder than ever to earn what I now felt to be little less than a gift; yet a gift I must accept.

Later in the afternoon Miss Cantor came in and asked me, in a supercilious manner, where she could find Mr. Hunt. I told her he was in the board room. In a few moments the office boy, who had taken an unaccountable liking for me, came in and volunteered:

"She caught it, all right!"

"She? Whom do you mean?"

"Cantor," he replied, with the freshness of the usual boy in his position. Then he went on, before I could stop him. "She asked the boss for a raise; said you'd got one; that Rogers told her so, and that she must have one, too, or she would leave. And

didn't he just light on her! Wow! You should have heard him. He said you done better work and tried harder all the time to make yourself—he used some big word about the firm—and then told her she would either have to wait until the other Mr. Hunt, her own boss, came back, or go. He wouldn't give her no raise. Gee! but it was great listening."

"Oh, George, you shouldn't have listened; it isn't nice," I said, then blushed to think how I had let him run on unrebuked. That I, too, had been curious to know what Kenneth Hunt had said to Miss Cantor shamed me. I did not like her. I couldn't. But that was no reason I should demean myself to her level.

"Ah, what's the difference!" George replied, running out to answer a call for him.

CHAPTER XVII

I was so busy getting ready for mother that really I had no time to think of anything else after my day's work at the office. Each day I did a little shopping, and then tried to sew a little each evening. Jennie had now given up her position in the restaurant, and, aside from her own sewing, making the tiny garments for the expected addition to her family, she was helping me make curtains and pretty cretonne overdrapes for mother's room. She was as interested as if it were her own mother instead of mine who was coming.

It was surprising how far that extra ten dollars a week went. I bought very carefully, figuring out the evening before just what I could afford to spend for each thing to be bought the next day. I was determined not to start in debt, and it would cost quite a bit to bring mother on from Chicago.

Her room was nearly ready. It was so dainty and pretty that I knew she couldn't help but be pleased. The walls were a soft creamy yellow; the rug gray, with a violet border. At the windows I had crisp dotted muslin curtains, with overdrapes of cream cretonne, with violet flowers to match the rug border. I also made the bedspread and bureau covers

of the cretonne. I had bought a brass bed and a bird's-eye maple bureau and dressing table. The maple was not so fashionable as some other woods, so I got it cheaper. I made dainty cushions for the chairs, and bought some very good prints for the wall—little, inexpensive things, but which, after they were suitably framed, added a homey touch to the room. Lastly, I had a picture of father and one of Harold beautifully framed—in this I was extravagant—and hung beside each other.

Jennie went into raptures when it was finished. The living room done in substantial browns and greens was very comfortable, as was my own little room in blue. The dining room I spent a good deal of time and money in furnishing. Next to mother's room it should be the best in the house. Mother always had been accustomed to such dainty service that I took a great deal of time and pains to make my money go as far as possible in this room. I read an advertisement of a sale of furniture in an apartment, and without hope of finding what I wanted, I attended the sale, which was on Saturday afternoon. Fortunately I found a black oak dining room suite which suited me perfectly. It was really fine. A large round table, a sideboard, and dish closet, besides six leather bottomed chairs, all for fifty dollars. I ordered it sent right down to the apartment, and Jim insisted upon giving it a good polishing evenings. When he had finished no one would have dreamed that it was not new; and it looked as well as those I

had priced in the stores for three or four times as much as I paid.

I had a dull blue rug in the dining-room and bought dainty, inexpensive, blue dishes. Then I hung blue denim over the muslin curtains at the windows, and Jennie made me a lovely centerpiece and sideboard cover embroidered in the same shade.

I wonder if anyone who reads my story can visualize my little home as it looked the day I sent for mother. The living-room couch was piled with cushions, and I had bought a few books and magazines to give it a livable look. My kitchen was complete for two. I had not provided a great quantity of cooking utensils because we would not entertain at all. My only friends being Jennie and Jim and Mrs. Murphy—aside from Mr. Hunt.

I always pity a girl, a girl alone in a big city. As Clark Cummings said the first time I met him:

"There is no loneliness equal to it."

Mr. Hunt said:

"The day you expect your mother take a holiday."

"Oh, but you are so busy!" I exclaimed.

"I will get along. Miss Cantor can stay late, if necessary."

So it was settled, and I could scarcely restrain myself, I wanted so to let him know just how much I appreciated his kindness, but I simply thanked him and turned to my work.

There had been a big break in the cotton market. Prices had made a new low record, the liquidation

prompted by good news from all parts of the cotton belt. Our private advices claimed that previous complaints of damage from any source had been exaggerated, and that the crop all over the south was making excellent progress.

I had adhered to my determination to study the cotton market thoroughly. So now, whenever there was a disturbed market for any cause, I was continually called upon for information about the subject. That I was of great assistance to Mr. Hunt I knew, and it delighted me that at last I could in a measure repay the many kindnesses he had shown to the ignorant, useless girl he had taken into his office when the world looked blackest to me.

Jennie was almost as pleased as if the apartment belonged to her when I told her that Mr. Hunt was coming up the next night to look at it.

"He'll like it!" she declared with conviction. "No one could help it. Jim says it's too pretty to muss up."

"Jim is a dear," I returned, "and you tell him mother will probably not do much mussing up. We'll do that evenings."

"Do you know, Sheila," Jennie said soberly, "I'm scared almost to death to meet your mother. Jim and me both are."

"You two foolish people! Mother will love you both. She knows how kind you have been to her poor, lonely daughter, and when she sees you and knows you she can't help loving you any more than I can."

"I hope so," her face brightening, "but me and Jim ain't used to her kind, you know."

"You are neither of you afraid of Mr. Hunt, and mother is like him," I reassured her, knowing that if she could understand that mother was as truly a gentlewoman as Kenneth Hunt was a gentleman she would be her own sweet, natural self when with her.

I was anxious for mother to like Jennie and her husband, and had in my mind to tell her of all the wonderful things they had done to make my life bearable. I had written much of them, except the little intimate things I could only tell. Mother would understand.

"Let's have Mrs. Murphy come to-morrow night, too," Jennie proposed. "She would be pleased, and Mr. Hunt likes her, you know."

"All right, Jennie, you walk around there to-morrow and tell her that I am all settled, and that I'd like her to come over."

The next night as soon as I had eaten my dinner I went to my new home.

I had ordered some ice cream and fancy cakes, and they came soon after I arrived. I busied myself in setting the table with my pretty dishes, and the doylies I had bought to match the centerpiece Jennie had embroidered. I had also bought a small bunch of flowers for the table. When I finished I stood off and looked at it while my eyes filled with tears to think that once more I was to have a home all my own, and mother with me.

I lighted every single room. It was extravagant, but it looked so pretty and cheerful I couldn't resist the temptation. I would do it only twice. To-night for my friends, the next time for mother.

After I had done all I could I sat down in mother's room to wait. The shaded lights shed a soft glow over everything, and brought out the beauty of the cretonnes, and really the effect was charming. I tried to sit still and rest, but it was impossible. Every minute I jumped up to straighten a picture already straight, or to pat the pillows, or rearrange the different kinds of pins I had put in the cushion on the dressing table; or to look for Jim and Jennie, who I knew would come early.

Just as I arrived at this conclusion the bell rang and Jim and Jennie came in. Of course Jennie had seen everything before, but Jim had not been over for several days, so that he had to be shown all through. We had scarcely finished when Mrs. Murphy came and I had to be gone all over again.

"It is just grand!" Mrs. Murphy exclaimed, her hands on her hips, as she stood in the middle of the living-room gazing around. When we moved on into mother's room she was silent for a moment, then startled all of us by exclaiming:

"Gosh!" Then realizing, she apologized. "That was Murphy's word when things was fine, and I just couldn't help it."

"I don't mind a bit," I said. "Say it as often as you like if you'll say it in the same tone."

"But, Miss Sheila, your mother'll be that proud. Not many girls are like you."

I was saved the necessity of replying by Mr. Hunt's arrival.

"Am I late?" he asked as anxiously as if it were a party.

"No, indeed," I told him; then after he had greeted the others he, too, had to be shown the apartment. It was really funny the way he insisted upon looking into kitchen closets, in the ice box, and examining everything as thoroughly as Mrs. Murphy had done.

We became quite hilarious over it, and it was a gay little party which finally trooped out into the dining-room for ice cream and cake.

"You shouldn't have done this," Kenneth Hunt said so low none but I heard.

I flushed as I always did when he used that tone, but made no reply. And amid much laughing and joking we took our seats around the table.

Mr. Hunt admired my dining-room suite, and I couldn't help bragging about how cheaply I got it. He was astonished.

"It would grace any home," he said. "It really is a wonderful bit of oak."

His praise made me more than ever pleased with my bargain. His compliments on mother's room delighted me.

"I'm afraid you spent most of your money before you thought of yourself," he said, as he looked at my own tiny room, which was very simply furnished.

"Not altogether that," I returned, "but I intend to take care of it myself, and I should have no time to dust and care for a room if it were not as simple as possible."

"Your good taste is almost equalled by your good sense," he replied. "But I hate to think you have to work so hard for me that you feel it necessary to deny yourself the dainty things girls love because you will not have the time to care for them."

When it came time to go he insisted upon taking us all home in his car. We dropped Mrs. Murphy first, then he took Jennie, Jim, and me for a ride through the park before we reached home. It was a lovely night and the ride rested and refreshed me and also did Jennie a world of good.

The next day I worked very steadily and very hard. I hated to be absent when there was so much to do and yet I couldn't resist the temptation to take the holiday Mr. Hunt so kindly offered. Mother was coming the following morning.

When he left the office, a full hour before I had finished what I wanted to do, he said:

"The car will be at your house at nine o'clock. That will give you plenty of time to reach the station before the train arrives. You have my congratulations on the happiness which awaits you."

I thanked him, then went right on working. I would leave nothing with which Miss Cantor could find fault. I was too tired to care for any dinner when I had finished, and so stopped and bought some

fruit and went directly home. When Jennie understood that I had had such a hard day she insisted upon making me tea and toast. Her eyes were full of tears while doing it.

"I don't know how I shall stand it without you, Sheila," she said as she placed the tray before me. "I am going to be too lonesome for anything."

"You won't be lonely for long," I returned, and amid her blushes she agreed with me.

"If it's a girl, may I name her Sheila?" she asked.

"Of course you may, you dear thing," and forgetting my weariness I jumped up and gave her a hug which nearly strangled her.

"And if it's a boy Jim wants to call it after Mr. Hunt. Do you think he would mind?"

"He would be just as pleased as I would," I assured her.

"Oh, Sheila! Sometimes I am frightened because of what is coming. I don't mean that I am afraid; only that I am not good enough, wise enough to bring up a little child. My life has been so hard; my own childhood so awful, that I tremble and am scared when I think about it. I want you to promise to help me."

"Of course I will, you goose," I replied, forcing back the tears at Jennie's naïve confession. "And mother will, too. And Jennie, you mustn't feel that way. You have been good always—so good. And Jim is true and good, too. I am sure you will both be very happy."

"That's why I am afraid, I'm so happy."

After Jennie left me I undressed and went to bed. But I was too much excited to go right to sleep. All Jennie had said to me, the thought of mother's coming sooner than I had hoped to have her because of my raise, all kept me awake. It was only the end of October and in my wildest dreams I had not hoped to be able to send for mother before the middle of November.

Yet at last I fell asleep and did not waken until Jennie called me.

"You will have to hurry if you are to meet your mother," she said, as she brought me coffee and rolls to eat while I was dressing. "I came in several times, but you was sleeping so sound I couldn't bear to call you."

Hurriedly I ate my breakfast, and just as I finished I heard the toot, toot of the motor horn before the house and knew that Kenneth Hunt had sent his car.

All my luggage except a handbag had gone to the apartment the day before, and that I carried with me. Tears flowed down Jennie's cheeks, and I felt like crying, too, but I wouldn't meet mother with red eyes, so I laughed instead and scolded Jennie for giving way so foolishly.

"Be sure you come over this afternoon and meet mother," I said at parting. "We'll have Jim over, too, after she has been here a few days. But I want you right away."

She wiped her tears away on the corner of her apron as she gave the promise, and so I left her comforted.

We arrived at the station just in time. Mother was so pleased, so delighted to see me, that I could scarcely get her checks so the chauffeur could attend to her luggage. I was sure Kenneth Hunt would want me to have him wait upon us instead of doing it myself. Her hand luggage we stowed away in the car while he was absent, both of us laughing rather hysterically at the number of boxes and bundles she had.

"It's all right to live with relatives for a while, Sheila, but really it isn't always pleasant. We will be very thankful and happy, dear child, no matter how plainly we have to live. Thankful and happy that we can be together at last."

When we drew up to the door of the apartment house mother looked puzzled. She told me afterward that she supposed I had taken rooms in a boarding house. But she said nothing. She would not before the chauffeur, whose presence I had explained to her. But so long as I live I never shall forget her expression, her delight when she realized that we had a real home all our own. When she broke down and sobbed more unreservedly than ever I had seen her, I knew in part what those long years without a home had meant to her as well as to me.

"It is all over now, mother," I told her when she had controlled her emotion. "We will never be separated again."

I love now, after all these years, to look back at the day mother came to New York and first saw the home I had by my own efforts prepared for her. When she saw her room with its dainty furnishings she broke down again. And as I explained that I could not have possibly accomplished so much without Jennie's help she vowed she would love Jennie as much as I seemed to.

"I am sure you will," I told her as we continued the inspection of our little nest. Every nook and corner of which she must explore before she even removed her bonnet. I had laid in a stock of groceries, and it was time to get luncheon before I realized it. I made mother sit down and talk to me while I prepared our first meal together in over three years. She urged me to let her do it, but I gayly informed her that she would have plenty of time to cook for me, while I only had an occasional holiday and Sundays to cook for her. So amid much talk and laughter we sat down to our simple luncheon.

About two o'clock Jennie came over as she had promised. Mother took to her at once, though I could see she was amused by Jennie's quaint speeches. Jennie at first was inclined to be shy, but that soon wore off when she saw how friendly mother was.

"You see, Mrs. Andrews, Sheila ain't like us. She's educated, and all that. But she can't love any better than we can, and Jim and me love Sheila."

"No more than she loves you, my dear," mother said. "And, my dear, you must let me love you, too.

Sheila has told me of all you have done for her in the past, and of how you helped her make this beautiful little home for me. You will soon need a mother's care, and I am going to be a mother to you—that is, if you will let me."

"Oh, Mrs. Andrews, if you only could know how I have wanted a mother like you—lately. Sometimes it seemed as if I couldn't go on alone with no one to care but Jim. Not that he ain't a whole lot, and does everything he can, but it ain't like having a woman who knows and cares."

"I understand, Jennie. I am going to call you Jennie, you see, right from the start. You never need have the feeling that you are alone again. I will be with you through your need. Sheila will have to get along alone for a little while."

"Of course I will, you two plotters," I told them laughingly. Jennie was perilously near tears and I did not want her to give way. So I gave her some tea and cakes I had made, and we talked of other things for an hour, when with more tact than many a society woman possesses she went away and left mother and me alone.

"I like your friend Jennie," mother said.

"I knew you would. I should have been more disappointed than you can imagine if you had not. I don't know what would have become of me, in those dark days I dared not write you about, had it not been for her. I owe every bit of success I have made to Jennie Watson."

"And to Sheila Andrews's plucky spirit," mother added.

After an early dinner we unpacked and arranged her clothes and all the little trinkets she had brought with her. Most of them gifts from dad. When we had arranged her toilet silver on the dressing table and scattered many beautiful articles on her bureau and table the room took on an air of luxury comforting in the extreme.

"Your own things were all it needed," I said, as we looked around after the janitor had taken the trunks downstairs.

"They do make a difference, don't they, dear? It was daintily pretty without them, now it is perfect."

She picked up a photograph of dad in a silver frame and said softly: "I wonder if he knows—has known all that has happened."

"Of course he knows. I have felt dad so near me, mother, so near at times that I almost believed he was really with me, that he had never left us. I am sure he knows that at last we are together and happy."

CHAPTER XVIII

In the days that followed mother and I talked of all the old friends, and of the old life. We spoke of all my old admirers, and at last of Clark Cummings.

"Have you ever heard from him?" mother asked.

"No." Then I blushed as I thought of the letter put so carefully away; the letter that had so interfered with my peace of mind.

I told mother, too, all about my interest in cotton. She seemed amused at first, then interested.

"But do firms trust women—girls—with such matters?" she queried.

"Yes, indeed! Why, mother, one of the greatest cotton experts in the south is a woman. It is wonderfully interesting work. I guess any work in which one specializes is apt to be absorbing. Mr. Hunt says I am of the greatest assistance in that line, and he gives me every opportunity to gain knowledge."

"Is that all you do—the cotton, I mean?" she asked. Then we both laughed at her uncertain way of expressing herself regarding business.

"My, no!" I answered. "I am really Jack-of-all-trades! You must know, mother mine, that I am getting a very large salary for a girl who had absolutely no experience, and less knowledge of business, until

I learned it in this office. Thirty-five dollars a week is about fifteen more than the girl next me gets, and she has been there years. Of course, I am sort of private secretary to one of the firm, and that makes a difference." Again I felt myself flush.

I was annoyed. Why should a simple reference to Kenneth Hunt cause me to blush?

That night after mother had retired I opened my bureau drawer and took out the box in which I had placed Clark Cummings's last little note to me.

My talk with mother had brought him back very plainly. I could almost see him as I closed my eyes and thought of his vibrating personality. It was strange that he never had written me. Perhaps he had and the letter had gone astray.

Long after I had retired I still thought of him: then, all suddenly, my mind shifted to Kenneth Hunt. I knew if it were not for the lingering sweetness of those days with Clark Cummings I should have cared very much for my employer. Did I as it was, and was I fooling myself? Was I turning away happiness that was waiting with outstretched hand for a mirage, a something that never would materialize?

When finally I fell asleep I had not decided the question to my satisfaction.

That there is a destiny that shapes our lives, that fate, or whatever we call it, twists us around its meddlesome fingers I cannot doubt. At least fate has played a large part in my life. I have had the good without in the least deserving it; and also the

unpleasant episodes, so unpleasant as to be hideous, without being in the least to blame for their happening.

Now once more fate in the guise of the postman had played her hand.

As mother and I sat cosily sipping our coffee the bell rang. I rushed down to the mail box expecting a letter from Harold. Instead I found a much read-dressed envelope in a handwriting that almost took away my breath. The night before mother and I had discussed Clark Cummings; the night before I had sat quietly awake for hours trying to analyze my feeling toward him; and now his handwriting stared up at me like a living thing.

I had run all the way down the stairs, but now I walked so slowly back that mother came to the head of the stairs to see what the matter was.

"What is it, Sheila?" she asked, her face whitening with fear. "Harold!"

"No, mother, it is nothing—just a letter for me."

She looked inquiringly at me, as I returned to the table and sipped my coffee. But she asked me no questions, for which I was grateful.

I slipped the letter into my pocket. I would not open it until noon. I longed, yet dreaded, to know what Clark had said to me after all this time. Whatever it was I wanted to be alone when I read it.

In spite of the letter, of which, notwithstanding my determination, I was conscious, the morning passed swiftly. At noon I bought some fruit and

then went into an old-fashioned hotel near the office and into the ladies' parlor. I knew that here I should be undisturbed, that no one would recognize me.

My hand trembled a little as I drew out the letter. I turned it over and smiled a little as I thought he had not forgotten me after all. The numerous addresses on the soiled envelope were proof of that.

Slowly I tore it open and drew out a single closely written sheet.

"Dear Sheila: I had thought to wait until you broke the silence between us. I dreamed perhaps you would need, that you would send for me. In a roundabout way I learned of your father's death. You have my truest sympathy. I have some slight idea of what he was to you from little things you said in that time so long ago when you said things to me. I have one comforting thought of you even in your sorrow, and that is that he must have left you with all the luxuries to which you were accustomed. It would have been hard for you had he not. I think of you very often, especially at twilight. I sometimes sit for hours on a bench in front of my house with only my dog and pipe for company and think of those few happy days I spent in Chicago, and of the girl who meant—that is past tense, isn't it?—who means so much to me. Sometimes I linger until the stars and the moon have gone to rest and the gray light of dawn creeps slowly upon me.

"Do you ever think of me? How I long to know your answer! Perhaps it is better that I do not. If

you do, won't you write me a line? That is, if you receive this note of mine, which says so little but which wants to say so much. I shall count the days until it reaches you; then the other days during which I must wait.

"Faithfully yours,

"Clark Cummings."

I turned back to the beginning and looked at the date. A little over a year had passed since Clark had written it. Was he still counting the days? Was he still waiting?

All the noon hour I sat there, Clark's letter in my hand. I forgot to eat the fruit I had purchased, and when the clock near me struck the hour I hurried back to the office, leaving it on the broad window sill.

In the afternoon I worked like one in a dream. Fortunately Mr. Hunt was so busy he did not notice my abstraction; and fortunately, too, I was kept constantly occupied. But ever between me and my work came the date on Clark's letter and the words, "I shall count the days I have to wait."

Miss Cantor may have sensed something unusual in my manner, for her sneers were very noticeable. Fortunately Mr. Hunt was so busy he did not notice she had gone out of her way to impose them upon me.

"Some one must be in love," I heard her say to Mr. Rogers, "by the way they moon around the office."

I immediately took myself to task, and for the re-

maining hour of business I attended to my work as usual. But if ever a girl was thankful when five o'clock struck I was that girl.

Mother had a nice dinner all ready for me, and everything looked so homelike, mother was so sweet and seemed so happy, that almost unconsciously I felt better as soon as I realized that I had a home at last and mother was with me.

I said nothing of the letter until we had finished and cleared away the dinner. Then, after mother had established herself in an easy chair by the table, on which was our reading lamp, and had taken out a little garment she was making for Jennie, I quietly laid Clark's letter in her lap.

"What is it, dear? Something for me to read?"

"Yes, mother."

She read it from beginning to end without a word. Then she did as I had done. She turned back and looked at the date.

"It has been a long time on the way," she said quietly.

"Yes—a long time," I repeated.

"What shall you do about it?"

"I don't know; I haven't decided," and as I spoke I visualized Clark sitting on a bench in the moonlight, with his dog and pipe for company, thinking of the girl he had known so long ago, and for so short a time. I thought of him sitting there until the moon and the stars had gone to rest, and until the cold, gray dawn of morning drove him in to sleep.

"If it hadn't been so long on the way," mother remarked, hesitating slightly over each word.

"Yes, then I should have known what to do," I answered dreamily. "Now I shall have to think it over. Come on, mother, let's go and call on Jennie. She'll be delighted." I could endure inaction no longer.

Mother immediately responded to my mood.

"I should love to," she said, "you have said so much of your friend I shall enjoy seeing her in her own home."

"Put on something warm, it's quite chilly," I told mother. "I hope Jim will be at home."

It seemed to me that the homely atmosphere Jim always gave to the apartment would be welcome to my frayed nerves. I was all on edge, as Jennie expressed it. So nervous I was just a little inclined to be hysterical.

I wonder if it seems strange that this should be so? That I should be so excited over hearing from this man whose wife I had refused to be and whom I had known so short a time and never seen since. If it does, remember that I had kept him always in my thoughts; a dangerous thing for a young girl to do; that he had kept me—rather the thought of him had kept me—from receiving or returning the love offered me by others.

My heart was thumping so hard it seemed mother must notice as we walked along arm in arm. I kept up a constant stream of talk until we arrived. To my

delight Jim and Jennie were both at home. Jim reading and Jennie's busy fingers sewing on the little garments she was so soon to need.

What a welcome we received!

"It is so good of you!" Jennie enthused, as she ordered Jim to place an easy chair for mother; and then insisted we remove our things and spend the evening. "I'll have to beg your pardon, Sheila! I was just sayin' to Jim that we couldn't expect to see so much of you now that your mother had come to keep you company; and here she's only been in New York a few days and you've come over just like you always did."

"Of course; and I'm always coming," I said, laughing nervously as Jennie's sharp, loving eyes gazed at me in the way she had when she knew something was worrying me.

"My coming shall never make any difference with Sheila's friendships. I only hope all her friends will be mine," mother said to Jennie in her sweet, gentle way.

Jennie showed mother all over her tiny home, Jim and I trailing along after them. Jennie made sport of me:

"She knows every single thing in the place by heart," she said. "And yet she always wants to come taggin' along."

"Of course she does," I answered her banter, "and so does Jim, and I guess he knows what you've got as well as I."

"You must have refreshments, and ice water and a rarebit don't go good together. Get some beer, Jim," she ordered.

Jennie had improved wonderfully in the language she used, yet at times she was comically her old natural self, the Jennie of the restaurant where she had worked so many years.

The rarebit was delicious. Jennie really had developed into a wonderful housekeeper. We lingered over it until late, and then Jim insisted upon walking home with us.

"It's too late for you two ladies to go alone," he said when I told him I was a working lady and perfectly able to pilot mother home.

"Remember I am ready when you need me," mother whispered to Jennie as we bade her good-night.

"It will be soon," Jennie replied with a blush, but a happy light in her eyes. "Jim is that pleased."

All the way home, while mother and Jim talked of impersonal things, mother trying to put him at ease and to get better acquainted with him, I thought of the light in Jennie's eyes, when she said:

"Jim is that pleased!"

Would I ever be able to feel as she did; that something that was to happen to me would give such pleasure to someone who loved me? I put my hands to my hot cheeks, and was thankful for the darkness that hid my blushes. It was not usual for me to be bold even in my thoughts. What ailed me?

As I asked myself this question, I knew. It was the

letter I had received that morning. The letter from the man who had been for years in the background of my mind, quiescent. The letter had brought back, not only him, but all the attraction he had for me, both physical and mental.

By the time we reached home, I had decided.

I would answer Clark Cummings's letter.

Immediately I had made up my mind my nervousness left me. As usual when I could see ahead I was calm.

"Aren't you going to bed, dear?" mother asked, as after divesting myself of hat and coat I sat down to the little desk in the living room.

"Not yet, mother. I am going to write to Clark. You run along and go to sleep. Don't lie awake trying to unravel any of my snarls."

"I won't, dear. You are quite able to unwind them yourself," and with a fond kiss she left me with Clark's letter lying before me and thoughts of him in my heart.

Some time I sat there before I began to write. It had been a year since that letter had been posted. Suppose Clark had married or he had put me from his thoughts; that he no longer sat on the bench before the door, with dog and pipe for company, and thought of me, but that some other had supplanted me.

All these things ran through my mind. Yet in my inmost heart I knew none of them were true; that Clark, if living, was still waiting for me. I don't

pretend to tell how or why I knew this, but I did.

When once I began to write my pen fairly flew over the paper.

"DEAR CLARK:—After a year your dear letter has reached me. Are you still counting the days when your reply will come? Are you still sitting on the bench until moon and stars have gone to rest thinking of me? Has the cold, gray dawn crept in again and again to find you still there? I can only hope this is true. And I am going to whisper it—I some way know that it is, and am glad. Do you understand, Clark, I am glad. I have much to tell you, much to explain. Life for me has been made up of sunshine and shadow, of happiness and dreadful unhappiness.

"Now all is peaceful. I have found my niche in the world and am trying to fill it, happy in the attempt. Yes, my precious father is gone. Yet he still is with me and I feel his love about me when I most need it. Mother is living here in New York with me. Harold is still in Chicago, but not in the old home. Your letter was so covered with addresses I could scarcely make out my name. That will explain why you have had so many days to wait for your answer. When I hear from you I shall write again. Then I shall tell you more of the years which have passed since we parted. Sincerely,

"SHEILA ANDREWS."

In the morning I posted my letter, then tried to put it, and what it might evoke, from my mind. But,

like Clark, I counted the days until he would receive it, and the days which must then elapse before I could hope for an answer.

One afternoon upon my return from business I found the apartment in darkness. It had been so cheery since mother came that I hated to go in. I switched on the light, and found a note from mother pinned to the lampshade where I could not fail to see it as soon as I got home.

"Jennie needs me. I must hurry.

"MOTHER."

That was all, but it told so much—so much more than the mere words seemed to convey.

I ate my dinner, and then sat down to read. I had no hope of seeing mother that night, nor thought of anyone else disturbing me.

About ten o'clock the bell rang. It was Jim.

"It's a little girl, Miss Sheila." And never in all my life before or since have I seen such perfect happiness, such pride of possession, radiate from any human countenance. Good, honest Jim was a father, and he was so happy that he lost all the shyness usual to him and was just the simple man and husband God intended him to be.

"We want to name her Sheila," he said, after I, too, had enthused over the addition to his family. "That is, if you are willing."

"Willing? Why, I should be heart-broken if you didn't!" I exclaimed.

"Jennie will be that pleased," he said, as he left me.

"Give her my love and tell her I'll come over to-morrow. Tell mother everything is all right and that I say she is to stay as long as she is needed."

"Your mother is an angel," Jim said, with the assurance of a man making a statement which he knows cannot be contradicted.

Before I went to bed I had decided what to give my little namesake for a present. I was really delighted that they wanted to call her after me, although I smiled as I thought of the name she probably would have had if Jennie and Jim had never known me.

The next afternoon, instead of going directly home, as was my custom, I went to see Jennie. When I rang the bell, the door, to my surprise, was opened by Mrs. Murphy, my old landlady—and Jennie's.

"Shure and it's a foine child!" she said as she kissed me.

"Of course it is; what did you expect? They've named her after me."

"Ah, go 'long with your nonsense!"

"But what are you doing here?" I asked.

"It's what I'd be doin' away, you should be afther askin'! You don't suppose your lady mother—God bless her—could be afther lookin' afther Jennie and the baby, and do all the work, too?" and the sniff with which she accompanied her words showed she thought little of my judgment if I had expected mother to do the impossible.

"I never thought about the work," I said, conscience-stricken at once. Of course, someone would have to do it, and just as, of course, mother wasn't able.

"Shure, you didn't! What does the likes of a chit like you know about what's to be done at such a time? You ain't had no experience."

"What can I do now that I am here—I mean after I have seen Jennie?"

"You can hold that blessed darlint if you'll promise not to drop her. I ain't much faith in you, mind!" And with a chuckle she went into the kitchen, while I went quietly in to see Jennie and her baby.

"Isn't she just lovely, Sheila?" Jennie asked, as the tiny face was turned toward me.

"Of course she is!" I hastily replied, although to be honest I thought her rather squinty looking and awfully red.

"She is a beautiful baby," mother said, with the decision that only comes with knowledge. "In a few days, when she bleaches out, you'll see."

"You talk as if she was a piece of cotton you were goin' to put on the grass to bleach," Jennie said with some of the old sparkle in her eyes.

"Mrs. Murphy said I might hold the baby if I wouldn't drop her. And she also said that she didn't have much faith in me."

"That woman is a perfect host. I don't know what I should have done without her," mother said.

"Everyone is so good," Jennie said softly. "Jim

says they are angels, and I guess Jim's about right."

"Now run out and see what you can do to help Mrs. Murphy," mother told me after I had gingerly held the baby a few minutes, and as gingerly put her down. I hadn't dropped her, but from the way mother laughed I had been pretty awkward.

"I knew they'd send you back to me!" Mrs. Murphy exclaimed when I appeared in the kitchen door. "Come now, dearie, and help me make some corn-starch pudding. You can stir it while you tell me all about yourself. It's an age since I've had a good visit with you."

CHAPTER XIX

I CHATTED with Mrs. Murphy, answering her questions, which were legion. I assured her that "that fine mon, your boss, Miss Sheila," was all right and as nice as ever. I parried her remarks about my falling in love with him and others until Jim came in. Then after he had seen his little family I sat with Jennie while mother and Jim had their dinners.

In the half hour I sat in the semi-darkness with Jennie, she showed me more of her real feelings, her thoughts and her aspirations than ever she had shown before. At times I was surprised at the thoughts she gave expression. She had grown with her happiness, and her freedom from lifelong drudgery.

"I only hope that some day you will be as happy as I am, Sheila, with your own home, your husband, and baby."

"Not so fast, Jennie," I tried to joke.

"But, Sheila, you should have all those things," she said soberly, just as mother and Jim appeared in the doorway.

"What are you two talking about?" mother asked. "You look very serious."

"Oh, Jennie was just telling me of all the nice things I should have," I spoke lightly. "If she could

have her way I'd have all the world with a fence around it."

"Stop thot talkin' and come and eat before it gits cold," Mrs. Murphy said, effectually putting a stop to our talk.

I went home as soon as I had finished. They didn't need me. Mrs. Murphy and mother could easily do all that was necessary; then there was Jim.

I was tired. We had had a trying day at the office. But more than all I wanted to be alone to think.

I opened my little desk and put another cross on the calendar. One less day to watch and wait. Then I curled up in a big chair and thought of that man who had loved me—*had* loved me. Did he still care? The answer to that question I had in my heart; but I hungered to hear him say the words. I longed for the assurance that I was as much to him as the day a year ago when he had written that letter.

Yet I did not know that I loved Clark Cummings. I was in love with my thoughts of him, with a shadow man who for all these years had been an intangible presence. Would I love him when I once again saw and knew him?

Strangely I had no quick heart response as I had had to my other question about his love for me. I sat up straight in my chair, shocked out of my listlessness. Could it be possible that I didn't know my own mind? That all I had been through, the attention I had received from Kenneth Hunt and others

had turned me from this man who had counted the days until he should hear from me?

The thought was in a way torture. Suppose I could care for no man as Jennie cared for Jim. I should miss all that she had said was mine by right, and which I myself felt belonged to me—sometime, somehow.

Suddenly the door bell rang. When I answered it was to find a grinning messenger boy waiting with a box nearly as large as himself.

"Sign here!" he said, pointing with a dirty finger.

I signed, then hurried back to the living-room to open the box, delighted at anything which would get me away from my morbid fancies.

When I raised the cover I gave a little scream of delight. A dozen of the most wonderful roses were exposed, and lying on top was Kenneth Hunt's card.

"He *is* good to me," I murmured, as I bent my face to the fragrant flowers. "Too good."

But by the time I had arranged them, robbing the house of every vase we had to do so, I felt more like myself, more like an every-day, normal being. My fancies seemed now rather ridiculous to me, and I took a late magazine and read until ten o'clock, when I went to bed and slept soundly all night.

The next day I thanked Mr. Hunt for my flowers.

"I thought it might make things more cheerful for you—and your mother," he answered.

"Oh, mother is away!" I exclaimed.

Then, at his blank look of astonishment, I told

him of Jennie's baby; that mother had gone over there to remain as long as Jennie needed her, and that they were going to name the baby Sheila.

"They couldn't find a sweeter name," he said softly.

"Will you mind very much if I take them some of the roses?" I asked. I hated to give them away, but it seemed so selfish to keep them all.

"No, indeed! They are yours to do with as you please. But that will not prevent my sending both Jennie and the baby some also, will it?"

I hurried home. The night before I had put a cross on the calendar as usual. But my cheeks grew hot, and I trembled a bit as I saw that the requisite number of days required to get a letter from Clark Cummings had passed. Before I took off my hat, mother handed me a letter, his letter.

"We shall not have dinner for half an hour, dear," she said, then left me, pretending to have something to do in the kitchen.

Dear mother! I closed the door of my room and read:

"SHEILA, DEAR:—I did count the days, the whole three hundred and sixty-five of them. They were endless days, filled with alternate hope and despair. But I am repaid, rather all the despair is forgotten. Only hope, blessed hope, remains. Now, once again, I shall sit on the bench and watch the stars and the moon rise and fade, but with an unspeakable joy in

my heart. Were it possible I would fly to you; but matters which I cannot explain tie me here. So I am going to send you my letters instead. Count the days, dear, and on each seventh day a letter will come to you. It will hold a part of my heart, a part of my thoughts, and all of my love. I close my eyes and visualize you as I last saw you. Have you changed, dear one?

"As I ask the question the answer is already in my mind. I know there has been no change; that you are the same sweet, light-hearted girl I knew ages ago. It has been ages, hasn't it? You were very lovely then; you are lovely now. I remember the dress you wore when last I saw you; the string of pearls your father had just given you; even the buckles on your dainty slippers I can visualize as I think of you.

"Do you remember our luncheon together when you spilled the salt? You should have blown some over your shoulder; then, perhaps, we would never have been separated. It brings back the luck spilled, you know. I can hear you say: 'The conceited fellow! How dares he say it would have been luck had we never been separated?' Well, it would have been luck for me; we will let it go at that.

"I often think of you and wonder if you would care for this country as I do. Its immensity is often appalling; yet I love it. I love the great width and length of it; the great silences which fill you with awe and wonderment. Its fascination holds me, as

some day I hope and trust it will you—the wonderful white nights, the breadth of sky, and cloud-ridden heavens. The mountains are so far away they make but a black line on the horizon, yet so near one can easily ride to them in a day and make camp at night in the foothills. Have you ever camped, dear, at the base of some leviathan of the hills, and awakened to the song of the birds, and then bathed in a running stream before breakfast? No, I know well you have not, you poor, city-bred girl, whose wings have never been tested, who would be afraid of the night, and of the mountains. But some day you will not be afraid, for some day I shall make camp with you and in the morning call you before sun up, so you can see and feel the majesty of morning. Does it not make your pulses beat?

"Even after the years, I have not yet become so accustomed to it that I can think or talk of it calmly. It stirs my blood, it makes me feel alive. Oh, you poor deluded city dwellers, how I pity you! And how I envy you. I pity you because you have never known the wonder of the wild. I envy you because you have kept my dearest with you so long.

"You will write me, Sheila. Tell me all your thoughts. All that concerns you is of interest to me. You see, lacking other company, I have to write you of the plains and the mountains, my companions. But you with your wealth of friends, with your days and nights filled to overflowing with pleasure, will have much to tell me.

"Remember me respectfully to your mother and brother. I have pleasant remembrances of both. I shall wait and watch. The postman will hereafter be a welcome silhouette on the landscape, because when I go to meet him there will always be a hope that he has a letter from you. Good-night, Sheila. The moon is just rising. To-morrow I shall ride to the mountains and make camp. I shall lie on the ground and watch the stars while I dream of the time when you will be beside me. Au revoir, dear one.

"CLARK."

I had only just finished my letter when mother called me to dinner.

After dinner I made her sit down with my letter while I cleared away. I did not want to see her face when she read.

"It is a wonderful letter, dear," mother said as I came in the living room after my work was done. "But, dear, he writes as if nothing had changed—with us, I mean."

"I know, mother, and I do not think I shall undeceive him. That is, not right away."

"But—why? If I may ask."

"Just a notion. Of course I shall tell him after a bit, but for the present I should just like to let matters drift. If he were coming it would be different; but so long as he isn't—well it may seem silly, but I would like him to write to the girl he knew, not to Sheila Andrews, the girl who works."

"I understand, dear."

That was one of the lovely things about mother, she always understood. Perhaps that was one reason dad was so utterly devoted to her. It is not a usual characteristic, but a very lovable one. Since the loss of her fortune she seemed to have grown even more sympathetic.

I waited a few days, then answered Clark's letter.

"So you counted the days for all that long year. Will it make the hopelessness any the less if I assure you that on each alternate seventh day you also will receive a note from me? I tell you this that you may not go to meet the postman only to be disappointed.

"What a lover of nature you are! Your mountains and plains are real living companions to you, aren't they? Of course, I have changed! One changes in mind and body in three years—it is about that since we lunched together and I spilled the salt. How chagrined I was! I wonder would it have changed my luck had I thrown some over my shoulder?—I wonder.

"So you think I would be frightened at the mountains—your mountains; and of the vastness of everything in your life. Perhaps; but, Clark, I have learned a little more of life since I saw you; I have a broader outlook upon all that goes to make up our lives. Your description of your camp fascinates me. I have never slept out of doors in my life. Neither have I bathed in a running stream before breakfast. You make me want to do both.

"And you are sorry for me, the 'poor city-bred girl'! Have you never heard of the woman who said she would rather be a lamp-post in New York than own the rest of the country? You see, Clark, I know city life, but the country as you describe it is a great unknown force. Should I be able to grasp all that it is, all that it means to you? I doubt it.

"Mother thanks you for remembering her, and returns the compliment. She is well, and the dearest mother a girl ever had. When I write Harold I will give him your message. I am sure he will be pleased to hear of you again. Of course, living in New York, I seldom see my old friends. Bob Merrick calls occasionally. He has gone into business, and is making a man of himself. One is now proud to know him and call him friend. I remember you thought him rather wild and innocuous. But he has changed wonderfully, and is doing all sorts of good with his money. Really I so seldom see any of the others you met that I know little more than do you of their lives.

"Will you be sitting on that bench with your dog beside you when you see the postman in the distance? Will you go to meet him, your dog trotting at your heels? And will you be pleased that he has a letter from me to you? By the way, you haven't told me your dog's name. As he is one of your family, and your constant companion, don't you think it would be more respectful to call him by his name? I love animals, so that is one taste we share in common. I wonder if there are others. Yours, "SHEILA."

After I posted my letter I thought of innumerable things I might have said. Then I smiled at my eagerness; I mustn't tell him everything at once, else my letters would soon become uninteresting.

I would soon have to tell him of our changed fortunes, of the fact that I was now a working girl instead of the gay society butterfly he had known. How would the knowledge affect him? Sometimes such quiet, reserved men were attracted only by their opposites. And I knew only too well that in the crucible of the last years I had lost much that in other days had been called attractive in my personality. It could not be otherwise. That I had gained correspondingly in the worth-while things of life never once occurred to me. I was just a girl and wanted to be attractive to the man who admired me—rather my memory.

"What has happened to you?" Kenneth Hunt asked me one day.

"Happened to me!" I repeated, "why, nothing."

"Oh, yes, there has." His smile took away all feeling of embarrassment from his words. "I have noticed it for several days. You look—and act, as if—well, as if you had a secret; one which made you happy."

I thought "What a wizard you are!" but all I said was:

"You will have to make another guess."

"Whatever it is, if it makes you happy I am glad," he said, ignoring my denial.

He was like this in everything; always thinking of me. Sometimes I felt conscience stricken, and all because I couldn't love him, or rather because I couldn't make up my mind whether I loved him or not.

There are occasionally people of whom we are so fond that it is difficult to analyze our feelings. That was the case with me as regarded Kenneth Hunt. I more than liked him, it would have hurt me deeply to lose his friendship; yet I didn't feel that I loved him—not the way he deserved and wanted to be loved.

If, instead of love going where it is sent, we could harness it and drive it where we would, I wonder if we, in the end, would be happier.

Clark's next letter came in just seven days. Some way I knew I should have been horribly disappointed had it not. He wrote:

"Dear Sheila:—If you can conceive what a drink of water is to a man in the desert, then you have some idea what your letter meant to me. Yes, dear, I have heard of that woman who preferred to be nothing in New York to everything somewhere else. But I hate to think that you could feel that way. It shows a littleness of spirit, of soul, a mind not willing to be convinced.

"You could not fail to grasp the beauties of the mountains and plains if you came to them with an open mind. But if you came to them with your mind closed to all but the fascination of the maelstrom of city life, then the wonders and the beauties of this country would not impress you.

"You spoke of Bob Merrick—overmuch it seemed to me in his praise. If I remember he was your most devoted swain—your 'shadow,' your friends called him. I am glad that he or anyone else does well, but I hope that he is still innocuous as far as you are concerned. As I recall him he was rather a fascinating devil.

"Yes, I was sitting on the bench with my dog beside me when I saw the postman in the distance, and as you prophesied, I ran to meet him, Bobby Burns trotting at my heels. Yes, my dog is named for the great Scotch poet. He is a Scotch terrier, so what name could be more appropriate? He also has many of the characteristics of the Scots. He is inclined to be quiet and to object if I do anything out of the ordinary. He is big-headed, short-legged, and has a long tail. Probably you are accustomed to the breed, although they are not as numerous in this country as they should be. I am glad you like animals. Something is lacking in those who don't. I have two horses, one my faithful pal and companion for years. Old Nell hasn't a fault, which is more than we can say of most humans. Tomboy is her son. He is a coal black, clean-limbed animal just three years old. I shall give him to you whenever you are ready to receive him. Now I am breaking him to saddle. He has a wonderful gait, steps high, and is a fit horse for his mistress-to-be. Could I say more in his praise? When will you be ready for your first ride? You see, I have no doubts, no fear but

that some day you will come to me, and that I on old Nell, you on Tomboy, we shall ride over the plains together.

"Am I taking too much for granted? That is perhaps my way. But something tells me that it is to be so; and whenever I hear the inward voice it encourages me to hope, and tells me that some day we shall be together—all in all to one another.

"I am working day and night to put my affairs in shape so that I can leave. I ache for the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, to see the light in your dear eyes. It won't be long, yet each day seems a year, so great is my longing. Will you be glad to see me? I shall know the moment you look at me.

"There is much I would say, but language is so inadequate to express my feelings. Thoughts which I cannot formulate rush through my mind, fleeting thoughts that will not be caught and harnessed to expression. But with your hand in mine I shall tell you of the things which are beyond the telling now. I shall put all my thoughts and dreams of you into words, words which must convince you that we belong to each other, that you are mine as I am yours.

"It is time for the postman to gather the mail. I shall get this to the box so that you may not look for a letter in vain. Farewell, dear heart,

"CLARK."

After reading Clark's letter I felt that I could not much longer keep him in ignorance of my changed

life. He thought he was writing to the daughter of a rich man who, most probably, had inherited a fortune. I did not really think it would make any difference in his feeling for me, yet I must tell him.

I felt it wasn't fair. I was letting him say things in his letters which, had I not made up my mind to marry him, I should not allow, and which also would embarrass him if my altered position made a difference to him.

I finally decided to give him a hint of how things were in my next letter; but to write more carefully and more reservedly. He said he was coming soon. At times I longed for the time to pass, and again I would have held it back. I was not sure of myself. Kenneth Hunt still exercised a great influence over me. I still enjoyed being with him, and I continued to accept many favors from him. I thought of talking it over with mother, then hesitated. It was something I must decide for myself.

So when I next wrote my letter was short. It was unsatisfactory to me, and I was sure it was also unsatisfactory to Clark.

"I have a great deal to tell you," I wrote, "but it will have to wait until I see you. We, mother and I, are situated very differently from when you knew us so long ago. I am not, never shall be, the same lighthearted girl that I was then.

"I assure you, Clark, that if I ever come to you it will be with a mind eager to be in tune with you and your surroundings. But aren't you, we, taking

too much for granted? Disappointment may await both of us. That sounds pessimistic, doesn't it? And I am not a pessimist.

"I can assure you on one point. While I admire him immensely, Bob Merrick is absolutely innocuous as far as I, personally, am concerned. He is fascinating. As to his being a devil, well—one never knows. It is a real treat to see him and hear all the gossip from my old home.

"I like Bobby Burns. I am sure he and I would become devoted friends. For one thing I adore a dog with a tail. Most of them nowadays are so fashionable they dispense with that appendage. And you are breaking a pony for me—I wonder if I shall ever ride him. What a perfectly fascinating name for a horse, Tomboy! And he's black. I have always wanted a coal-black steed; yes, indeed, I have, ever since I was a tiny girl in pigtails and pinafores and read fairy tales.

"As you say, written language but poorly expresses what we wish to say. When we write we either say too much or too little. So fearing I shall say too much, au revoir,

"SHEILA."

I felt as I folded my short letter that I had given him a hint that all was not as he had expected. I would not tell him more until he came. Then he must either know all or nothing.

Does it seem strange that I did not know my own mind better; that I shilly-shallied back and forth?

There had been a time not so long before when I almost thought I cared enough for Kenneth Hunt to marry him. Perhaps had I not received Clark's letter just as I did I should have been his promised wife by this time. I knew only too well that a little encouragement from me would bring another proposal; that he had not given up the hope that I would finally consent to marry him.

I was torn between my loyalty to him and my feeling toward Clark. It was wearing on me and I looked almost ill. Mother, I think, sensed in a measure that it was nothing which she could help; for, beyond coaxing my appetite with dainty dishes, she made no difference in her actions; neither did she annoy me by asking me if I were ill.

Mr. Hunt, too, looked anxiously at me several times and one day said kindly:

"Don't you think you'd better take a day's rest, Sheila? I can spare you to-morrow, and you are not looking up to your usual form."

"Really, I am all right, Mr. Hunt. I don't need a rest."

"Suit yourself, of course, but do not hesitate to ask for a day if you feel you need one, or a week if necessary."

So it went as a result of the continued kindness on the part of this man, who, I knew, loved me dearly, At times I felt that I must leave his employ. Then I thought of mother and our dainty little home and of the probability that not for a long time could I

make myself valuable enough in another office to earn as much as I did for Hunt & Hunt. I felt that I was in a sense earning what they paid me. The elder Mr. Hunt had returned, and to my delight and surprise he had treated me exactly as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER XX

JENNIE's baby, my namesake, was to be christened. I was to stand god-mother, and had provided the christening robe and cap. I was almost as proud as Jennie. Mother had been right—the baby was really very pretty. Nature had seemingly taken the best points of both parents and reproduced them in the tiny creature we all were learning to love. Mother was really silly about her, so I told her, and laughed when she denied it.

"It's not silly to love the little darling," she said to me.

"But you will spoil her. Jennie says you do already, that after you have been there the baby expects them to do nothing but pay attention to her small wishes."

"Nonsense! I don't spoil her one bit more than the rest of you do," she returned.

When the christening was over—I had felt very grown-up and solemn during the ceremony—we all went to Jennie's for dinner. They had it on Sunday purposely on my account. Mrs. Murphy, Mr. Arnold, manager of the restaurant where I first met Jennie, and Minnie Rolfe, the girl who helped clear

up the department store theft of which I was so wrongfully accused, were there.

I don't know how I came to mention it, but on Saturday I had said something to Kenneth Hunt about the new dignity I was to acquire as godmother. When he returned from the church the flat wore a festive look. Flowers were everywhere.

"A big box come, miss," the girl Jennie had hired to help said, "and thinkin' it was somethin' for dinner, I opened it. Then I just couldn't help fixin' them. I love flowers so, and I was afraid they'd git thirsty before you folks got home. Here's the bit of pasteboard what come with them."

She handed me Kenneth Hunt's card.

"Isn't he good?" Jennie said as we admired the flowers.

"Here's something else I found in the bottom of the box," and the girl handed Jennie a sealed envelope.

"What do you suppose it is?" Jennie asked, turning it over and over.

"Suppose you open it and see! Thot would be my way," Mrs. Murphy snorted, leaning over Jennie's shoulder. "Land sakes, it if ain't for the baby!"

"Yes, it says Miss Sheila Watson," and Jennie tore open the envelope while we all waited anxiously.

A thin book fell out. That was all. Not a scrap of paper or writing of any sort.

"It's a bank book," Jim said, under his breath, while Jennie read from the outside of the book:

"Miss Sheila Watson. The Dime Savings Bank."

Jennie's hands trembled as she opened the book. And when she looked at it the tears rolled down her cheeks, although her face shone with happiness.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing, Sheila? Your Mr. Hunt has given the baby a hundred dollars, has put it in the bank for her, all in her own little name," and she hugged and kissed the baby until Sheila cried.

"Thot mon is one foine mon! I always said it, and I ain't no raison to change me mind," Mrs. Murphy said, while Jim stood absolutely speechless with surprise and gratitude.

"The baby has a nice little start," mother said, in her quiet way. "It was kind of Mr. Hunt."

"It is all because of Miss Sheila," Jim found his voice at last.

"No, indeed, it isn't, Jim! Mr. Hunt has often spoken of the pleasure it has given him to number you and Jennie among his friends. And I am sure he was just as happy in giving this to little Sheila as you are to receive it."

"Just the same I have an idea that her name had something to do with it," Jennie said, as she smiled through her tears and looked slyly at me.

All these dear ones would have been delighted had I married Kenneth Hunt. They loved us both. But I changed the subject by pretending the arduous duty of being godmother had made me hungry and that as dinner was ready I intended to eat whether anyone else did or not.

They all trooped after me to the table. I look back to that simple dinner in Jennie's little flat as one of the bright spots in my life. Such simple good nature, such unaffected happiness, such delight in having friends around them I have never seen equaled.

Once more Miss Cantor had been plainly insulting. The elder Mr. Hunt had sent for me, and in some way the boy had made a mistake and sent Miss Cantor in to him. He had refused her services, at the same time reprimanding the boy, whom he again sent to me with his message. As I went into his office in response to his summons Miss Cantor came out.

"The office pet!" she sneered.

I paid no attention, save to feel myself blushing. It had been sometime since she had been openly insulting, and I had begun to hope she had made up her mind that as I paid no attention it did no good.

I took the dictation Mr. Hunt desired. Then I returned to my desk. As I passed through the outer office Miss Cantor again sneered:

"The office pet has had its back stroked in one room, now she will in the other," and then both she and Mr. Rogers, to whom she had been talking, laughed loudly.

I flung my notes down upon my desk. I was alone in the room, and for a moment I had a strong impulse to go to Mr. Hunt and tell him that I would endure such slighting remarks no longer. Then my anger passed, as I thought that perhaps I would soon leave them to go with Clark. Miss Cantor was, I knew, a

valuable girl in many ways. I would do nothing to lose to the firm services which they might need—surely would—if I left. She had been with them for a number of years, and was conversant with all the details of the business.

Isn't work a blessing? Real work that occupies both mind and body. I was so busy that I had no time to think of slights or of things that made me unhappy. Then, too, to work at something in which one is interested is an added blessing, and I was interested in my work. Just at this time the cotton market was particularly engrossing. Cotton was making new high records for the season; with the late months relatively firm and active. The trade was bullish and had been making money, and was still confident of even higher prices. This gave me extra work, as I compiled and handled nearly all data relative to cotton in the office.

Then Miss Cantor's remark was effectually banished by the fact that it was the day upon which I could expect a letter from Clark. I was not disappointed. One awaited me when I reached home. After a few opening words, he said:

"I expected to be with you by this time, but I find that I cannot leave before the first of the year. It will be a long six weeks waiting for the time to pass, and yet in thinking of you I shall not be unhappy. What a wonderful thing this love is, a God-given boon to mortals. I find myself singing, and it is constantly one refrain: 'Sheila is coming!

Sheila is coming!' Bobby Burns looks up inquiringly as if to say, 'Why don't you change your song occasionally?' and I tell him that my lips only repeat what my heart is saying, and then he wags his tail understandingly as I resume my song.

"I have been wondering, dear, in what respect your life has changed since I saw you. I do not mean to be inquisitive; it is only that anything which affects you affects me through my love for you. You say I must not talk of that until we meet once more; that it is not fair to hold out a hope that never may be realized. That hope, dear, is my very life, and to give it up would be like giving up life itself. So I shall hold fast to it until I hear you tell me that it is vain. But never will you say that, dear one. I feel in my heart that it is impossible. You were made for me—my mate, my woman.

"I had a long ride on Tomboy yesterday. I talked to him of you, and he seemed to understand. He laid his ears back the better to hear, and then would neigh in delight as I described his mistress. People who doubt that animals have intelligence should have them as companions. My horses, my dog, are closer to me than are humans. They understand me better, and I them. You didn't need to tell me you were fond of animals, I should have known it without the telling. There are some things we have to be, you know, in order to be ourselves. That is one of the things you would have to be. Not to love animals would be incompatible to my knowledge and thought of you.

"Never was lover watched for and welcomed as is my particular postman. Your letters are my calendar. I measure my days and hours, almost my moments, by them. Be sure you don't fail me. For it would be denying meat and drink to a hungry, thirsty man. Yours, CLARK."

Mother said she had called me to dinner three times, yet I had not heard her, so entirely was my mind on what I had read. Clark was so sure that I was his mate, "his woman." Was it so? Was this something which had kept me from yielding to any other man, the unconscious knowledge that sometime, somehow, he would find me again, and that I belonged to him?

After I had gone to bed I thought long of Clark's dear letter, and wondered if ever girl had so devoted a lover. I smiled in the darkness as I recalled what he had said about talking to Tomboy, and his song, "Sheila is coming!" that he sang to the sympathetic Bobby Burns. It was all so quaint—and so dear.

Then the old question came to me. Should I tell Clark of all the things which had happened since I had seen him? Was it fair not to? I had been a very rich man's daughter—a supposedly rich man—when he knew me first. Now I was a poor working girl, without a penny save as I earned it, and with my mother to support. Was it fair to keep him in ignorance any longer?

It was bound to be difficult to put on paper all the things that had happened since last we saw each other. Then for the first time came the thought, dismissed almost before it had crossed my mind, "Had he cared for father's wealth and his position?" No! I would not so degrade his feeling for me as to put it upon such a plane. I would write him exactly how things were with me without going into detail as to what I had gone through in the last three years. I would tell him of the loss of the money and that I was in a position where I earned my own and mother's support.

As soon as I had decided I fell asleep and did not waken until mother called me.

"I have decided to tell Clark of the change in our fortunes," I said as I sipped my coffee.

"I think you are wise, dear. I have felt it was the thing to do all along. Yet I did not want to influence you."

"I shall simply tell him of our changed circumstances, mother. Of all that has happened I shall tell him nothing until I see him. It may be I never shall tell him; that there will be no need."

"That is all that is necessary, dear. You were a society girl, the indulged daughter of a rich man when he met you. To some men there is a glamour about such girls, especially when there is added—as there was in your case—beauty and character. And I do not say that Mr. Cummings was, or would

be, at all affected by all these extraneous matters; but they may unconsciously have had their effect. So I think you are wise to tell him the simple truth."

"I am so glad you agree with me, mother," I said.

"Wait a minute, there's the postman, perhaps I shall have a letter from Harold," she added as I started for the door.

As I was quite early I waited.

"I sort of felt I would get a letter," she said when the bell rang, "and it is from Harold, too. Listen, Sheila.

" 'I have good news, mother! I have been given a much more responsible position, with a corresponding raise in salary. I could make a home for you now, but suppose Sheila won't give you up.' "

"I should say not," I interrupted.

" 'But I enclose check for my half of the home expenses and shall send the same each month until I get another raise. When Sheila gets married, mumsie, you and I will keep bachelor hall, and then I shall be sure I can do something to repay all you did for me when I was too young and too careless to appreciate it. So tell Sheila not to put off marrying on our account. Hoop-la! I feel like a bloated bondholder. It's fine to earn your own living, and to feel yourself growing more and more efficient daily. There's nothing like it! Your loving son.' "

Mother's eyes were full of happy tears as she finished Harold's boyish effusion.

"The loss of money isn't always a curse," she said

slowly. "It has made a man of my boy, a man of whom any mother might be proud; and a wonder woman of my girl. I cannot be thankful enough for my two blessings."

"But look at your check, mother. I must go, and I couldn't work if I didn't know how wealthy we were going to be."

"It is for fifty dollars. The dear boy must be sending us at least a third of his salary. I can't accept so much. With you I feel I can earn a part by making a home for you, and keeping it in order. But to take so much of his salary when I can do nothing for him."

"You must take it, mother. Put it in the bank for a rainy day if you don't need to spend it all. But don't spoil his happiness by saying a single word against taking it. It would break his heart. Why, he is so happy to be able to send it, that it would be wicked to even mention such a thing as refusing it."

"Perhaps you are right—the dear boy."

I kissed mother good-by, sure she would have a happy day thinking of Harold, and replying to his letter. I smiled as I thought of what he had said about my getting married. It sounded almost as though he wished I would so that he could have mother. I blushed as I thought that perhaps he would have his wish before long. Clark—if what I had to tell him made no change in him—would be an impetuous wooer. I would have to decide quickly. He was the most masterful man I ever had known.

That perhaps had been one of the reasons he had attracted me. In the old days all the young men had been too pliant, too willing to do as I said. It had detracted from my interest in them.

Girls are like that. They pretend they want a man on his knees, then when one comes along who will not bend to them that is the one with whom nine times out of ten they fall in love.

All day I thought of the letter I must write Clark. I was absent-minded, and once I caught Kenneth Hunt looking so intently at me that I flushed nervously.

"I should like to know of what you are thinking, Sheila," he said. "I have been watching you for some time and twice I have spoken. You are not worried over anything, are you?"

"No, indeed. What is it, Mr. Hunt?" and I took my pad to his desk. "Please pardon me; I didn't mean to let my thoughts go wool-gathering."

"I did not want to dictate," he said with a smile. "I simply wanted to ask if I might call on your mother to-night? I should like to pay my respects if she is to be at home. I shall hope to see you also."

"We will be glad to see you," I replied contritely, still embarrassed that I had not heard when spoken to.

"Then I shall come," he said and turned to his desk.

I hurried home at the end of the day and, after an early dinner, I changed my dress and also asked mother to dress up, as Mr. Hunt was her caller, not mine. Then I ran out to the corner, and, with wilful

extravagance, bought a dozen pink carnations for the table in the living room. Kenneth Hunt had sent me so many flowers that I had pride in having some he had not paid for.

But when he came in he had two wonderful bunches of violets with him—one for mother and one for me. Mother was delighted at the courtesy he had shown her, and she fairly beamed upon him. I could see, too, that his exquisite manners, his conversation, pleased her. He was like the men she knew and entertained in the old days when dad was alive. He belonged to the same class.

Mother was so natural and talked so well that I was as proud as a peacock. Kenneth Hunt would see that she, at least, was to the manner born. He remained so late that he apologized:

"I don't know when I have spent a pleasanter evening," he said at parting. "May I come soon again?"

"I hope you will," mother replied graciously.

"Miss Sheila says nothing," he said, turning to me with a smile.

"I second mother's invitation," I lightly replied.

"Then you may expect me very soon."

"Well, how did you like him?" I asked mother when the door had closed.

"Very much, indeed. He is a charming and, I think, a good man. He also cares for you."

Mother's intuition was very keen, and I had been more reserved than usual, fearing Kenneth Hunt might show her his feeling for me.

"Yes, I think he is a good man," mother repeated, referring to Kenneth Hunt; "I like him very much."

"So do I. He has been wonderful to me," I replied heartily. "But, mother, we cannot compel anything more than liking. You know the old saying, 'Love goes where it is sent,' and I am really becoming fey about it. I believe that somewhere there is a Jack for every Jill. That they don't always find each other is perhaps the reason so many married people are mismated."

"I hope, dear, that you will find your Jack," mother said as she kissed me good-night. "I am sure I found mine."

I went to my room immediately to write to Clark.

"Yes, Clark, it will be a long six weeks," I wrote. "Time is always long when we are anxious for it to pass, and how swiftly it goes at other times. It is only three years since we parted, but it seems many more. And yet, in spite of all that has come to me, Clark, the time has gone quickly at times.

"You say you have been wondering in what respect my life has changed. In every respect, Clark. Nothing is as it used to be. You need not apologize. I know you do not ask from idle curiosity. I have long wanted to tell you of the years which span the time since we met, but thinking you would soon be here I have put it off. One can talk things so much better than they can write them. But now that you are not coming until the first of the year, I want you to know at least a part of what has happened.

"When father died he was supposedly a very wealthy man. But after his affairs were all straightened out, his debts and business obligations met, there was nothing left. We lost even the home. Harold gave up college and went to work in Chicago. He is doing splendidly. Mother is with me. And it is not the 'me' you knew, but a much more serious, much older, 'me.' I, too, have been obliged to work. Don't think I am whining, because I love my work—now. I will not deny it was hard at first; but that is all in the past. Mother and I have a nice little home, and I am doing my best to earn the salary my kind employers give me.

"Now you know, rather you can imagine, the change that has come to me and mine. It is your right to know.

"Enough about Sheila Andrews. Now I am going to tell you that your delightful letter pleased me immensely. That you should talk of me to your horse and your dog flatters me. I should love to see them; especially Tomboy. I do so love horses, and never have known fear of them. When I was in boarding school if there was a particularly fractious horse in the stable I was the one who rode it.

"So the postman is eagerly watched for, is he? Perhaps he brings other letters than mine. I have not flattered myself that so charming a man would have only one correspondent. Isn't that nicely said? I cannot yet understand why you are not lonely. Evidently you have no companions of your own kind,

else you would talk to them instead of to Tomboy and Bobby Burns. Don't you ever long for other humans? I am sure I should. You see, I am a sociable creature, though a busy one as well. I like people, to mix with them, and to talk to them—not all people, of course, but those who are congenial. Don't you ever miss human companionship? Tell the truth, now, 'fess up,' as we used to say in school.

"How I am rambling along. It is late, and I am very tired. I have had a hard day. So good-night, Clark. SHEILA."

I did not read my letter after I finished it. I knew it was a choppy sort of an affair, yet I had tried to tell him several things in it. Aside from my anxiety over what he would say when he knew my changed circumstances, I often thought of the lonely home he wanted to take me to. Could I be happy away from everyone? Would even his society make up to me for all I must leave behind if I went with him? I had tried to show him my fears. I knew he would understand.

Then once more, as it often had done before, came the thought of what my life would be were I to marry Kenneth Hunt. A life of ease and luxury. I would have music, theatres, and all that goes to make life more than a dull monotony. I would have horses and motors, a beautiful home, and a man who loved me when I was poor, unhappy, and discouraged, and whom I almost loved in return, as my husband.

Was I turning away the substance for a chimerical future with Clark, because he from the very first had appealed to my senses as had no other man?

As usual I went to sleep my questions unanswered. Often I wished I could just let matters drift. Then I could let fate decide for me.

CHAPTER XXI

When I reached the office the following morning there was a thick envelope on my desk. I opened it and just glanced at the signature. It was signed by Miss Cantor. I had no time either to read it or to speculate upon its contents. Mr. Rogers had curtly informed me that she wouldn't be down, and that I would have to do her work again that day.

I answered him pleasantly, but it made no difference in the malevolent look he bent upon me. Then with a visible effort he smiled and added:

"When you have a little leisure will you take some letters for me?"

"Certainly," I replied. "It is part of Miss Cantor's work, so why not?"

I would not have him think I did it as a favor to him. It was work of the office, and consequently had to be done.

He saw through my little ruse, and once again the malevolence shone in his eyes; but he said nothing more, and I had forgotten all about it when a little later I went to take his dictation.

"You are sure you can spare the time now?" he asked.

"Yes, or I should not have come to you," I replied coldly.

While I was working Mr. Hunt passed through the office, and out. That left Mr. Rogers and me alone. He almost immediately stopped dictating. I looked up to learn the cause. The manager was looking at me in a way that made me shiver.

"Will you go to dinner with me to-night, Miss Sheila?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" I replied, rising. "If you have finished with your letters I will go."

"I haven't finished!" he said shortly, "sit down!"

I resumed my seat and waited.

"Why won't you go with me? Haven't you forgiven me for making a mistake when you first came? Most men would, seeing the boss so thick with you. You don't say no to anything he wants, I'll be bound." He leered at me in a way that made me want to strike him.

Once more I stood up, this time taking my notes.

"Not so fast! We're alone, and I want to know why you think I am not good enough for you?"

"There can be no talk of that sort between us, Mr. Rogers. I hope you will not make it necessary for me to resign my position; but rather than be subjected to your insults I shall do so."

"Hoity-toity! we're on our high horse! Perhaps you'd like an excuse. You think Hunt would look after you, don't you? Well, I'll have one kiss anyway!"

Before I could move he had put his arm around my waist, and his face close to mine.

I was almost fainting with fright. As I said we were, as far as we knew, all alone in the offices. It was four o'clock and the board room was closed, and Kenneth Hunt had gone out. The office boy might come in; then again, he might not. I was absolutely in this man's power. But just as I felt his hot breath on my face something jerked him away from me, and threw him against the wall, while I sank in a heap on the floor. I had not heard the door open; neither, evidently, had he.

"What does this mean?" Kenneth Hunt demanded, looking from one to the other.

"Didn't you ever kiss a girl that you need get so busy?" Mr. Rogers sneered, while all I could do was to say "Thank God, thank God," over and over.

I had not tried to rise. I knew I could not stand. Kenneth Hunt lifted me gently and set me in a chair. I leaned my face on my arms on the desk in front of me, and sobbed wildly. I tried with all my strength to stop, but it was impossible.

"Don't cry like that!" Mr. Hunt begged. Then he asked: "Did that brute kiss you?"

I noticed his voice trembled.

"No! oh, no! thank God!" I hysterically replied.

"He had better thank God! If he had touched you with his lips I should have killed him!" Kenneth Hunt said so low I scarcely heard. I knew the cringing figure against the further wall could not hear.

"Now, Rogers, you gather up your things and get out. I'll give you your check when you are ready."

"You don't mean you are going to discharge me because of that little thing?" he asked in a voice hoarse with passion.

"That's just what I do mean. I never want to see you in my office again."

"I'll go to your brother."

"Go! But I wouldn't advise you to tell him the reason of your discharge. He wouldn't stop where I have."

"So, he's hipped on her, too! Well, I'll go, but I'll get even with you, miss, and don't you flatter yourself I won't! Remember what I say. I'll get even!" he repeated with emphasis, then slunk out of the room.

As the door closed a sudden realization of this man's business value to my employer rushed over me. He had been with them many years, and was a valuable man in many ways. He was an indefatigable worker, and strictly honest. Perhaps I shouldn't remain very much longer with the firm. Was it fair to deprive them of this man's services?

"Please don't discharge him," I said after a moment. "I am sure he will never offend again, and you need him."

"But——" The hesitancy with which Mr. Hunt spoke showed me more plainly than anything he could have said that I was right. I followed up the advantage.

"You are very busy just now. Mr. Rogers knows

all your customers. It would be foolish to inconvenience yourself because of me—of what has happened. It is not necessary for me to come in contact with him. I was trying to take Miss Cantor's place."

Mr. Hunt threw open the door. Rogers could be seen clearing out his desk.

"Come here, Rogers!" Mr. Hunt ordered. "Now apologize to Miss Andrews. She has interceded for you. What you have done is unforgivable, but if she will pardon you I will give you another chance. That is, if you care to remain."

He finished with a proud uplift of his head.

"I'm sorry," Rogers said in a surly tone.

"Very well, I accept your apology," I said weakly, wishing I were at home with mother.

"One thing before you go, Rogers," said Mr. Hunt. "Never ask Miss Andrews to do anything for you again. If Miss Cantor is not here, either wait or get someone else. Miss Andrews will do no work save for my brother and myself. Now you may go."

Kenneth Hunt turned his back upon the man.

"I am afraid he will attempt to injure you in some way if I discharge him. While he is a very valuable man in many respects he is inclined to be vindictive. That was why I listened to your plea for him, not because I could not get along without him."

Would I ever learn the kind heart of my employer? I had thought his hesitation due to his fear of losing the man.

"I am going to send you home in my car. You

are not fit to go in the subway. Would you like me to go with you?"

"Oh, no; please don't. But if you will let your chauffeur drive me home I will accept thankfully. I am rather shaken." And I tried to summon a smile, but it was rather a pitiful one, I am afraid.

"I wish you would let me save you from all such experiences," he said, as I put on my things. "It is hard to see one you—care for—exposed to—such things."

I put out my hand. An impulse I could not resist impelled the action.

"Thank you for—everything," I said.

Before I could take my hand away Kenneth Hunt had raised it to his lips.

"You have nothing to thank me for—dear," he said softly. Then immediately he gave the waiting chauffeur the order to take me home.

"Shall I take you to the car?" he asked.

"No, please, I will go alone," but I noticed that he watched from the door until I had entered the elevator.

"You have had a hard day, dear. I can tell by your looks. Is that other girl still away, and are you doing her work?" mother asked anxiously.

"Yes, to both your questions," I answered, glad that Miss Cantor's absence could be used as an excuse for my white face.

"Well, you lie down until dinner is on the table, then you are going straight to bed. I'll help undress

you just as I did when you were a tiny girl. I am afraid you are working harder than you otherwise would to make things comfortable for me."

"Not a bit of it," I returned. "You forget that we are rich now that you have so large a check from Harold. No, mother, you have absolutely nothing to do with my work; only to make it easier. Just think what it is to come home to this when I am tired. You should have seen me in Mrs. Murphy's boarding house, making tea on the gas when I was almost too tired to stand."

After dinner mother did as she had threatened, and helped me undress and then tucked me in bed as if I were two years old. I suggested reading a while, but she vetoed it immediately and put out the light and opened the windows before she left me. I fell asleep almost immediately and slept soundly until morning. I felt perfectly all right again, and yet before we finished breakfast Mr. Hunt telephoned to say that if I felt at all badly I should remain at home.

"You see, you were ill yesterday," mother said after I had hung up the receiver.

"Yes, but to-day is another day, and really, mother, I was not ill, only over-tired and nervous."

"You are sure you are able to go down to-day?"

"Quite sure; and, mother dear, don't worry about me."

When I reached the office and opened my desk the first thing I saw was the letter from Miss Cantor, which I had opened, but not read. Well, it would

have to go unread until I reached home. So I tucked it into my coat pocket so I would not again leave it, and straightway forgot all about it.

Naturally I felt a little nervous and more than a little anxious as to how Mr. Rogers would act after the experience of the previous day. But he seemed to have himself well in hand, and aside from a perfunctory bow when I passed him on entering the office, he appeared absolutely oblivious to my presence.

One could not help but admire the man's sangfroid, or nerve, whichever it was. I felt myself flush, and it made me self-conscious and ill at ease. However, I was soon absorbed in my work. Reports from Washington had had an unsettling effect on the cotton market, and it seemed to be the general impression that it was time to sell. I was glad to be kept busy. I did not want to think of the night before.

Once during the morning I found myself counting the days until I should receive my next letter from Clark. He had been absolutely to be depended upon each seventh day. Now it seemed a long time to wait. A long time before I would know whether he would find any difference in Sheila Andrews, a rich man's daughter, and Sheila Andrews, the working girl.

Mother, without meaning to, had instilled a doubt in my mind. She had said that there was a glamour about a gay, beautifully dressed, carefree girl to most men. I felt that she was right. And while I knew that Clark was an unusual personality, he might, in this regard, be no different from others.

And to be honest, I must say that I did not know my own feeling in the matter. You see, I was not sure I wanted to give myself to Clark. I was not sure I wanted his masterful love, and the domination he would exercise over me. To be perfectly frank, I did not know my own mind. And why should I? I didn't know him. I had a memory-man to whom I had given my allegiance—in a way, a phantom lover, who had filled my girlish mind, and whom I at times feared would disappoint the sober, serious woman I had now become.

To my surprise when I reached home I found a letter from him.

"Isn't he ahead of time?" mother asked, smiling.

"Indeed he is; about four days."

"Well, read it, dear. You will have plenty of time before dinner."

He wrote as follows:

"Dear, Brave Sheila:—So that was the change you hinted at. I scarcely know how to write what is in my heart. To think that you, dainty, protected, indulged, should have been battling with the world all this time that I thought you still society's favorite—a darling of the gods.

"To say that I am proud of you, that it is no more than I would have expected could I have known the need would ever arise, is trite. Yet that is what I want to say. I remember your father well; the

sense of power he always gave out. You are your father's daughter. Can I say more?

"What you have told me makes me the more anxious to come to you. The more intensely anxious to bring you back with me. I can scarcely grasp what you have told me—that you, you are a wage earner and a home maker for your mother. I feel like uncovering my head and bowing the knee. You are wonderful, wonderful.

"I shall be with you, dear, at the earliest moment. We are having trouble on the ranch. Many heads of cattle have been rustled, and I am anxious. My superintendent turned out dishonest, and I am practically alone. Of course, you do not understand what the life of a rancher is, but, God willing, you will soon know and love it as I do.

"With all my love, and a boundless respect, I am, yours, CLARK."

"Read it, mother! Read what he says!" I exclaimed, as she called me to dinner.

"Yes, dear." As she finished, "It is what any real man would have written."

Mother had said that Clark had written as any real man would. Down in my heart I never had believed that the change in my circumstances would make any difference to him. Yet I was comforted to receive his letter. I felt like answering it at once, telling him all I felt. But I restrained the impulse. I even now did not know my own mind, was not sure

of myself. I would wait for his regular weekly letter, and then reply to both at once.

After dinner I thought of Miss Cantor's communication, and sat down to read it, supposing, of course, it had something to do with her work at the office. Imagine my surprise as I read the opening sentence—then all that followed:

"Dear Miss Andrews:—I am not well. I shall be away from the office for nearly a month. Will you do what you can to hold my position for me? I know I have not treated you right; that I have been jealous and horrid. I am not going to ask you to forgive me—I know you could not.

"But I am going to ask you to do a kindness. Just as you would do one for a perfect stranger of your own sex. If I lose my position I shall lose everything. I know you cannot understand—yet. But wait until you finish my letter before you judge me.

"About three years ago I went to work for Hunt & Hunt. I was young, foolish, and impressionable. I never had been thrown in contact with a man like Kenneth Hunt, and in a short time I was desperately in love with him. Don't think he encouraged me. I know now that he did not. It was his way to be kind to everyone, even his office help.

"From the very first Avery Rogers suspected my feeling for Mr. Hunt, and took advantage of it in many ways. He himself was in love with me. At least he called it love, and was jealous. For a long

time I repulsed him, then one night he told me that Mr. Hunt knew I was in love with him (Mr. Hunt), and that he was talking of letting me go because of it. But that if Mr. Hunt thought I was in love with his manager instead he would let me stay.

"I would have done anything to be near Kenneth Hunt—anything! So (as I believed every word Avery Rogers told me. I did not know him as well as I do now) I allowed the story to get about that I was having an affair with the manager. But the semblance of an affair did not suit him, and he constantly kept threatening me. I was fully aware that he could have me discharged, and that I could only keep my position through him, for until you came he had entire control of all the office force.

"The time I spent at Mr. Hunt's desk was all I lived for. I tried to become more efficient so that I could be with him more; and I succeeded—just before you came. But in the meantime Avery Rogers had grown more and more determined that I should do as he wished; and scarcely a day but that he threatened me with the loss of my position. Finally one day in desperation I consented to marry him. You ask why? Frankly I don't know. I was weak, foolish, and believed every word he said. He promised to keep the marriage secret and also promised I should always keep my position. As I said, I was weak, and completely dominated by him. I insisted upon being married by my own priest. For, with all my faults, Miss Andrews, I am a good girl.

"Avery was good to me; seemed to care a lot. We had a little apartment way uptown where no one knew us. You see a firm like Hunt & Hunt wouldn't have kept me had they known I was their manager's wife—so Avery told me, and he also said he would lose his position. As neither of us had anything save what we earned, I, believing him, easily consented to let no one know of our marriage.

"You see I had no people. I am alone in the world.

"When you came I saw—oh, very soon, that Kenneth Hunt was in love with you. It made me very bitter, very angry. Then I saw that you had attracted Avery. Then Mr. Hunt gave you my position. I was banished from his office. I turned to Avery as I never had before, until I found that he, too, was crazy over you. That I hated you goes without saying. Then suddenly I found I was to become a mother. Do all women love the father of their children? I think they must, for I commenced to care for Avery. As I say, he had been kind—when alone with me. But he now repulsed me, grumbled because he had married me, and declared I had 'roped him in.'

"I know now that I am unable to come to the office that he will try to make love to you, perhaps—thinking you know nothing of my story—he will ask you to marry him. I know you are also a good girl, and that you would have nothing to do with him if you knew he was married.

"Now, will you try and hold my position for me? I am his wife, but he cares nothing for me—since he

saw you. But be on your guard. He is very vindictive. I never have dared cross him. Do not let him know I have written you.

"HELEN CANTOR."

Did you ever read a stranger communication? How could a girl be so easily influenced? I gave the letter to mother to read; and she felt as I did, that the girl was not quite right mentally.

The next morning I said to Mr. Hunt:

"Miss Cantor is ill. Please allow me to do her work until she is able to return."

"But, Miss Sheila, that will necessitate your taking dictation from Rogers, unless——" and he stopped.

"She is afraid she will lose her position," I replied. "I want to hold it for her."

"You are possessed of a forgiving spirit, Sheila," Kenneth Hunt said slowly. "Miss Cantor has gone out of her way to be unpleasant to you. Why should you do her work as well as your own?"

"Please, Mr. Hunt!" I insisted.

"Since you are so insistent I will hold her place for her; but you cannot do her work. That I will not listen to."

He touched the bell and when the office boy appeared he said: "Go over to the agency and tell them I shall need a stenographer for a short time."

"Thank you, Mr. Hunt, Miss Cantor will be very grateful. But please do not let Mr. Rogers know that I offered to take her place."

When I told mother of how it had worked out, she remarked:

"Mr. Hunt is one in a thousand."

I knew mother was right.

"Will you write Miss Cantor?" mother asked.

"No, she gave no address. Have you forgotten how abruptly her letter ended?"

"I have thought of that letter all day," mother mused. "I wish I knew where the poor thing lived, I would go and see if I couldn't help her. You remember she said she had no people."

"You would mother the whole world if you could, I believe," was my reply.

"When one has had trouble, has known what it means to go down into the shadows, it makes one feel kin to all who are in trouble," she returned. "But as she gave you no address, I don't suppose she wants us to know where she is. In such a case I might do more harm than good if I attempted to see her."

"I could secure her address—I think. But if she had wanted me to know it she certainly would have given it to me in the letter—that peculiar letter. No, mother, I think this is once when even you would not be welcome."

Jennie and Jim and Mrs. Murphy were coming over for the evening, and as we were to give them what Jim called "a spread" we had a good deal to do.

I thought as I made sandwiches—the kind that Jim liked—that if I went away with Clark I should miss these dear ones who had meant so much to me.

Jennie who had fairly dragged me out of the very depths of despair; Jim with his hearty good will toward me and his appreciation of both mother and me; dear Mrs. Murphy who loved us all, babied us and scolded us in one breath.

So I wanted them to have pleasant remembrances of the little home where mother and I had been so happy together. And mother entered so into the spirit of anything I attempted that we were like two young girls working and playing together.

"Shure I come early," Mrs. Murphy said as she put in an appearance fully an hour before we expected her, "I had an itchin' you would be fussin' for us to-night, and so I come over to help."

She unrolled a parcel she had with her, and donned a big kitchen apron.

"Oh, Mrs. Murphy!" mother objected. "We don't need any help, really we don't."

"Then you go set down, and I'll help Miss Sheila. It ain't for the likes of me to be a-settin' idle while you work."

"No, indeed! You are company, you know."

"Company is it? Shure it's no company I want to be! It's one of the family I'd be."

"And so you are, dear Mrs. Murphy," I told her, then motioned mother behind her back to let her have her way.

"I'm glad that you own me, Miss Sheila," Mrs. Murphy replied with an injured air.

"I have always felt that you were one of my family,

Mrs. Murphy," mother said gently, "because you mothered my girl when she needed it so badly."

"There now, you've made me cry!" and a corner of the apron was put to use drying tears which came easily to the old Irishwoman. "Shure Murphy would be that proud of his old woman if he could see the foine friends she has, God rest his soul."

"Perhaps he does know, Mrs. Murphy," mother replied.

"Well, if he does he shure is some wonderin' how I ever run into such luck. Luck was what Murphy was a-callin' everythin' good what happened. Though he warn't so lucky hisself. He died, you know."

CHAPTER XXII

JENNIE and Jim came in soon after we had finished our simple preparations. They had not been over in some time, and I tried to forget everything save to make them have a good time.

Little Sheila was sound asleep when they arrived, and Jennie laid her on my bed. Jim had carried her over in his arms.

"I thought it would be just as easy as wheeling her," he said. "Then, if Jennie wanted to, we could ride home on the cars instead of walking."

"Just as careful of Jennie as ever," I said.

"He's more so, Sheila. Honest to goodness you'd think sometimes I was made of glass," Jennie told me.

"Be glad, Jennie, that you have such a husband," said mother, "and you, Jim, thank God for a wife like Jennie. It is the greatest thing in the world when two people who love each other make a home for each other."

"Don't forget that the baby helps," I exclaimed. "I sha'n't have my little namesake left out."

"Shure it is the babies what keep the grown folks straight," Mrs. Murphy added, the ever-ready apron on its way to her eyes. "If our boys had lived perhaps

Murphy would be alive. He'd a hated for the little fellows to see him tipsy."

We all knew that Mrs. Murphy was much happier, much better off, without the defunct Murphy; yet we all admired her for the way she spoke of him, always excusing his faults, and never failing to shed a tear for him.

We played hearts for a time—that is, Jim and Jennie and I—while mother and Mrs. Murphy talked and sewed on some garments they were making for little Sheila. The child would certainly be spoiled, Jennie always declared. She had too many looking after her.

By and by she awoke, and then the sewing was put away, the cards lost their interest, while we all watched the little dear laugh and coo with delight when Mrs. Murphy talked to her.

She talked such nonsense in her broad brogue that we all laughingly cautioned her to be careful or she would teach it to the baby.

"She might talk worse things than Irish!" she said in pretended indignation.

"Now, Mrs. Murphy, Sheila is only teazing you," mother hastened to explain.

"Don't I know it, the rogue," she returned with one of her loving looks at me. "Ain't I been tazed by her that same for two years or more?"

About half-past nine we had our spread. Sheila had again gone to sleep, and we went out into the dining-room. It was one of Jim's ideas that things

tasted better when you sat down to a regular table. He hated to have things passed and to hold a plate on his lap. He used to say:

"If I get a grip on the plate my napkin slides on the floor. If I hang to the napkin I'm always afraid I shall drop the plate."

"Oh, what good times we have, don't we, Sheila?" Jennie said as we sat around the table. "What ever shall we all do if you should get married? Jim and me was talking about it last night, and it just seemed to me I couldn't stand it if you got married and I couldn't see you."

"I guess if she does git married she ain't going so far away we can't see her!" Mrs. Murphy said as she winked at me.

I knew she was thinking of Kenneth Hunt, and in spite of myself I blushed.

"There, you needn't blush. He's a foine man, and no girl need be a blushin' for him."

"Oh, Mrs. Murphy, please don't take so much for granted," I pleaded.

"Well, all I can say is that you don't know which side your bread is buttered on. That boss of your'n——"

"I really wish you wouldn't talk that way," I returned interrupting. "Mr. Hunt is my employer and my very good friend, nothing more."

"I thought you wouldn't promise him without telling me," Jennie broke in, and then to my relief mother changed the subject.

It was eleven o'clock when they left us. And as mother closed the door, after cautioning Jim to keep the sleeping baby well wrapped, she said:

"They will miss you dreadfully if you marry Clark and leave New York."

The new girl at the office did her work efficiently. It was a great relief to me to have her there, and that I did not have to come in touch with Mr. Rogers. Beyond a stiff nod he had not noticed me for some days.

My surprise can be imagined when, just as I was going out to luncheon, he stepped up to me and gave me a letter.

"She asked me to give it to you," was all he said.

While I waited for my simple luncheon to be served I opened the letter. It was, as I had suspected, from Miss Cantor.

"Please come and see me to-night." That and the address made up the letter. But as I turned it over, and then slipped the short message back into the envelope it seemed pathetic to me. The girl must be in some terrible trouble to write me again. Did Mr. Rogers know what she had written and what her trouble was?

There was no use speculating about it; yet the brief invitation was scarcely out of my mind all the afternoon.

I showed mother the note, and she wanted to go with me. But I insisted upon going alone.

"She is a queer sort of a girl, mother. If you were with me she might not say a word."

In spite of hurrying as fast as possible it was after nine o'clock when I reached the apartment house. It was an attractive looking place, and as I rang the elevator bell I thought that Miss Cantor was at least comfortably housed.

"Miss Cantor, please?" I said to the boy.

"There ain't no such person living here," he answered unconcernedly after the manner of his kind.

I glanced at the number. Yes, it was the one she had given me. Then like a flash came the thought that perhaps she went by his (Rogers') name here, and had forgotten to tell me.

"Is there a Mr. and Mrs. Rogers living here, then?"

"Yes, fifth floor. Turn to the right, second door," the boy told me, then answered a call.

I pushed the bell, and in a moment a slatternly girl appeared.

"Yes, come in," she said when I asked for Mrs. Rogers.

"Who are you talking to, Mary? Has Mr. Rogers come?"

"No, it's a lady to see you," was the reply.

As a door was opened I saw Mrs. Rogers, or Miss Cantor, as I had always known her, lying on a couch in a room which, had it not been in such disorder, would have been very attractive. She, too, was untidy, and I noticed also looked very ill.

"I didn't expect you so soon," she said, rising.

"Don't get up. We can talk just as well if you remain on the couch," I told her. "I came as soon as I could. What can I do for you?"

"Get my husband to come to me and stay with me until after," she said almost fiercely. "I can't go through it alone. I can't and—I want him."

"Where is he?" I asked.

"I don't know. But he said he wouldn't be up to-night. That's why I sent for you. But he'll be at the office to-morrow; that will be time enough. He mustn't wait any longer—the doctor told me so yesterday. And I can't go through it alone—I can't!" she repeated, her voice shrill with fear.

"Are you all alone? Is that your maid?" I asked.

"Yes, she was all I could get. She is careless, impudent, and can't cook fit for pigs to eat. And I don't know a thing about housekeeping. I've always worked in an office, you know. It's horrid here, but it was pretty when Avery fixed it up for me."

I could well believe that. Then I remembered that with all Mr. Rogers's faults he was always immaculately neat. Such untidiness must annoy him.

"Never mind that, we'll soon make the house look all right. Now tell me why you sent for me?"

"Just to beg Avery to come to me while I need him so. He'll come if you ask him; I know he will."

Could I do what this poor girl with a mortal fear in her eyes asked? I would. What were my little

affairs compared to the great unknown trial she was facing? So I answered quietly:

"I will ask him, and I know when I tell him how you need him he will come."

I had spoken to Helen Cantor (or Rogers) with more assurance than I by any means felt. I did not at all relish my task. I dreaded speaking to Avery Rogers on any subject whatever. But I had given my promise to ask a favor, to persuade him to grant it.

"Would you object if my mother came to you for a day or two?" I asked her.

"Oh, I have a nurse engaged," she answered, flushing.

"I don't mean as a nurse, but well, she's just mother, you know, and you told me you had no one —no relative."

"I haven't! Avery is all I have."

Her tone was almost hopeless. I felt so inadequate to talk to her or to help her. I wished that I had allowed mother to have her way and come with me.

"Have you had any dinner?" I next inquired. She was very pale and had great shadows under her eyes.

"Yes, such as it was. I can't eat the stuff that girl cooks," she declared with a little of the old spirit.

I went out into the little untidy kitchen and made her a cup of tea and some toast. The maid was not to be seen, much to my relief. While I worked I thought that I would ask Mrs. Murphy to come up

with mother and help get the place in order. It was really in a shocking condition.

Helen ate her toast and drank her tea. Then I filled the tub with hot water and she took a bath, and I remained until she was in bed. At her request I cautioned the maid not to leave her, and promised I would send mother in the morning.

Late as it was when I got home, I called Mrs. Murphy and asked her if she could go with mother in the morning.

"I have a lot to do, but I'd go with Mrs. Andrews if I lost every boarder I got," she declared.

Mother was very much interested, very sympathetic.

"Poor child! I don't wonder she has made such a muddle of her life. A girl who has never known a home, a real home, is to be more pitied than blamed for her mistakes. I do hope he will treat her well—now."

"You will be awfully shocked at the disorder and dirt," I told her, but she only laughed.

"A girl who has been in an office all her life can't be expected to know much about running a house and the maid probably takes advantage of that fact. We must try to get her an older woman. One who will take a little responsibility."

The next morning I went into the office determined to speak to Mr. Rogers at once and have it over with. But I had no opportunity until just before noon.

"May I speak to you a moment?" I said to him when finally we were alone in the outer office for a moment.

"Yes," he responded in a surly manner, but one which I much preferred to the one I feared he would use.

"Helen, your wife, sent for me last night. I went to her. I promised that I would ask you to come home and remain with her until"—I stopped embarrassed. I had not given a thought to what I, a young girl, should say to this man about so delicate a matter.

"Yes, I know," he said gruffly.

"Will you go? I am sure Mr. Hunt will not object." Then boldly I asked: "Why not tell him your reason; that you are married?"

"I'll attend to my own affairs," he snapped.

"I did not mean to meddle. My mother is with her and will remain until you get there—longer if you wish her to."

"Your mother—there?" His voice was husky.

"Yes. Your wife could not be left alone; and she has no mother, you know—no one but you."

"A lot of good I have been to her!" he said brusquely. "I suppose you think you are heaping coals of fire on my head, and you are. I can't quite understand why you are doing all this, and—your mother."

"Just because I want to help. Miss—your wife never liked me, but it was because she didn't trust

you," I said boldly, "and because she had learned to care for you. That is all, Mr. Rogers. But I hope you will keep the promise I made, depending on you. She will die, I think, if you don't."

"Die! what do you mean?"

"She's afraid," I answered. Then, abashed by my temerity, I fled.

All through my luncheon I kept wondering if he had gone to her, or if I would find him in his place when I returned to the office.

Mr. Rogers did not come in again that afternoon. I could hardly wait to get home to talk to mother.

"Did he come?" I asked her before I removed my things.

"Yes, dear, and I think you have been the means of bringing them together. He seemed very penitent, and after they had had a long talk he came to me and tried to say things to me, to thank me, etc. I stopped him, but told him that he must be very patient, very careful of his wife. That she was very lonely, and alone, but for him; and that he would have to fill the place of mother and husband. Then I asked him if he would like me to come back this evening and remain with them for a day or two. He broke right down and cried like a baby. He said something about being rotten to you, and that he hadn't treated her, his wife, right, and really I was at my wit's end to know what to do with him. Some men are like that—they need some kind of a jolt. The idea that he was to be a father seemed never

to have appealed to him until yesterday. I think they will be happy together. He says he sha'n't let her go back to work; that he can take care of her."

"He can, very nicely. I know what his salary is," I interrupted.

"Mrs. Murphy was there cleaning up when he came. He was chagrined because of the looks of the place, but I explained that his wife was in no condition to attend to things if she knew how, and that she didn't know how."

" 'I thought all women knew enough to keep a house clean,' he said to me, revealing at once one bone of contention between them. He, I noticed, was very neat."

"Yes, he always looks well groomed," I replied.

"Well, Mrs. Murphy and I have taken charge until we can find a maid. The nurse comes in the morning, and as soon as possible we will let this maid go. He gave me a hundred dollars and asked me to spend it as I thought best for what was needed. I never saw such a change in a person in my life as in his poor, little wife. She was sick, frightened, and discouraged when he came home. Now she fairly radiates happiness. She says she doesn't care how much she has to suffer now that he will be with her, and will love her. Poor girl."

So it was to come out right after all. Mother had gone back to Helen, and after I cleared away I sat down to write to Clark. It was hard to bring my thoughts to what I wanted to say to him, I was so

excited over what mother had told me. But finally I wrote:

"Dear Clark:—Mother said she was sure you would respond as you did to my news, yet lest you should be unduly flattered, she added that any real man would. So you see mother considers you a real man.

"I think I always have. That that was one of the things about you which appealed strongly to me, that and your western breeziness. You were so different from the young men whom I had always known. Not that they weren't nice, for they were. Dad saw to it that I knew no others. But you were somehow different.

"I have much to tell you of the years since I saw you, much that is sad, some that I would forget, and a great deal of happiness that has come to me. For I have been happy and contented the past year. To tell me I in any way resemble my dear dad is a sure way to make me very proud. Did you know that when you wrote?

"No, I do not understand what life on a ranch is like. I don't even know if I understand what 'rustling cattle' means. I am sorry about your superintendent. It must be very hard to be obliged to look after everything yourself.

"I shall make my answer short, as you know my regular letter is nearly due—it should be here tomorrow. You see I, too, keep watch of the postman

even if he does drop it in the box in the prosaic way things are done in the city; instead of bringing it to me down (or up) a dusty road.

"Don't forget to remember me to Bobby and to Tomboy. I feel all the thrill of possession when I think of them. Yours, SHEILA."

When I finished my letter and prepared for bed—I had first gone out and posted it—I felt it was a very inadequate, uninteresting letter. I wished I had it back, that I could express more plainly how glad I was that the knowledge of my changed surroundings had made no difference in his feelings for me.

"But how could they?" I asked myself. "He is a real man."

In the morning, just as I had finished my lonely cup of coffee, the telephone rang. It was mother. She asked if I had slept well, if I had had a good breakfast. Then she said:

"I'll be home to-night. It's a boy, a beautiful child, and Mr. Rogers is wild with delight. He has telephoned Mr. Hunt this morning. He wrote him all about everything last night, and now is waiting to hear if, after his confession, his place is still open. I never saw a more penitent man. If he hadn't gone for a walk I couldn't have told you."

The next day about eleven o'clock Mr. Hunt, while dictating some important letters, said to me:

"Why have you done all this for Rogers?" I

flushed as I noticed that he had taken up an open letter which lay on the desk.

"I haven't done anything for him. If I have done anything at all it was for her."

"Did you know they were married?"

"Only for a few days."

"Did you know it when he made his disgraceful advances to you?"

"No—it was that very day I read a letter Miss Cantor—Mrs. Rogers—had written me."

"And still you shielded him? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I had no intention of shielding or helping him. I did it for her," I repeated.

"Yes; but she had treated you badly, too."

"I know. But she was in trouble—great trouble. And I know what it means for a girl to be alone in a big city and be in some great trouble."

"Rogers writes me that your mother is with them —that she has been there all night."

"Yes, and dear old Mrs. Murphy, too. You don't suppose she would let mother go without her!"

I tried to joke, but the tears were very near.

"Sheila, your mother is an angel."

He said it so seriously that I broke into a peal of laughter. Then I said:

"I know that, but angels would be of little good if they were not ready to help mortals."

"They have a little son," Kenneth Hunt said softly after a moment. "Rogers telephoned me. He wants

to come back if you will forgive him. It all rests with you, Sheila. The man appears very penitent. It may not last, however, although the child may be an incentive. If it will make you the least bit uncomfortable we will let him go. We can get along nicely without him, so don't let that influence your decision."

"Please do not discharge him. It may be a bit embarrassing at first—I don't know; that will depend upon his attitude. But, really, I have faith that he surely is converted. I honestly believe he will go straight. And—I promised Helen to help."

"Very well. But remember, I must know if he oversteps ever so little again. He would be a cur to do so now, but——"

"I really don't believe he will," I interrupted.

"Very well. I'll try him." And so the matter rested.

The next day when I reached the office a little earlier than usual, Mr. Rogers was in his old place. But one glance at him showed that it was not the same Mr. Rogers I had talked to only two days before. He came straight to me, and in a manly way begged my pardon. He made no excuses for himself. He said he realized he could not. But he thanked me so meekly for what I had done, he said he couldn't talk of what it had meant to have mother with him, that I told him we wouldn't discuss it any longer, but that we would commence from that day as though the past had never been.

Mr. Hunt asked me what Mr. Rogers had said. I repeated part of the conversation, and assured him that I felt positive we should have no more trouble in any way with him.

"I shall go up and see her—Mrs. Rogers—to-night," I told him. "Mother wants to stay until about nine o'clock and I shall go up and come home with her."

"Is your mother going to remain up there indefinitely?" he asked with a smile. "She seems to adopt all your friends—and enemies."

"No, mother won't go after to-day. But Mrs. Rogers is so ignorant of housekeeping and—babies. She said she just had to go the first day Mr. Rogers came back to the office."

"I'll send the car around for you at half past eight. It will be easier for your mother than coming down in the subway."

"Oh, it isn't necessary, and"—I started to object.

"Please, Sheila. Don't deny me so little a pleasure."

Mother was delighted when I went for her with the car.

"I was dreading that long ride down in the subway," she said as she leaned back comfortably. "Mr. Hunt is always so thoughtful."

CHAPTER XXIII

For the next few weeks I recall nothing of importance in my life. My work at the office went smoothly now that the friction caused by Mr. Rogers's attitude was removed. The new girl was very competent and often was able to relieve me of some of the elder Mr. Hunt's work.

Harold came to us for Christmas; just a flying trip. But mother's pleasure in seeing him, her happiness in having us both with her, was wonderful. We spent the day alone, rather selfishly, mother feared. But we laughed at her when she said she was selfish.

Kenneth Hunt had sent wonderful flowers to both of us and a great box of delicious candy.

"Looks suspicious, sis!" Harold had said, as he munched a chocolate.

"It's not," I answered; "but he's kind."

"I should say so; mother's been telling me," and he gave me a keen look.

"Mother shouldn't tell things," I returned, laughingly.

We didn't go out all day. Most of the time we sat quietly talking about the old days when dad was with us. Then Harold told us of his work, his hopes and dreams.

"Hurry up and get married, sis; I want my mother!" and he leaned over and kissed her fondly. "I'd be just as glad to have you also, but I don't suppose there's any use asking such an independent female as you have become to give up and come with me."

"No, indeed! You'd better be careful or I'll never get married and keep mother always."

We went to the train with him, and waited until we could no longer see him waving to us. When we reached home there was a letter under the door. My letter from Clark. I had been looking for it all day, and had it not come special delivery I shouldn't have received it even then.

"Run, and open it, dear; I'll clear away," mother said.

We had left all the dishes until after Harold should be gone.

"Dearest," Clark called me, "I wonder if you will be looking for a letter. To be sure you will not be disappointed I am sending it special delivery. At holiday time the mails are sometimes uncertain.

"The time is very short now, dear, before I shall see you, shall look in your eyes, and know what is to be my fate. Try and love the thought of me, dear one, and so prepare yourself to love me when I come.

"I am very busy. You never could guess what I am doing, and I am not going to tell you. You'll have to come and see. Don't you realize, dear heart, that you must come?

"I shall be with you New Year's eve. We shall watch the old year out together, dear, and welcome a new year together, a new year that, God grant, may bring fulfilment and happiness to us both. Until then, dear."

As always, I read and reread his letter with varied feelings. Would I be able to do as he wished? Would I want to do it? As Clark's face used to come between me and thoughts of others, now the remembrance of Kenneth Hunt's goodness came into my mind.

I was vitally anxious, yet dreaded, to see Clark. I remembered his masterfulness, and knew I would be hurried along to a decision once he was with me. Within four or five days he would be in New York.

"He's coming, mother," I told her, and she didn't ask who, just said:

"Are you glad, Sheila?"

"I think so, mother. Yes, I am glad."

"Then it is all right, dear. Now we must go to bed. It is late and you will be worn out. Don't lie awake thinking, dear. Just go to sleep and get your rest."

The next day I was so excited I could scarcely keep my mind on my work. I think Kenneth Hunt noticed, because I caught him looking keenly at me once or twice. Late in the afternoon when he was very busy, I, too, looked closely at him. His face expressed so much the man he was, high bred, aristocratic, kind. Was I making a mistake in not taking

the great love he had offered me, and which I knew he would never consider as hopeless until I married?

I have heard girls say that never for a moment did they waver in their choice of a husband. But I certainly was an exception.. I could not feel certain that I wanted to marry Clark Cummings, even now. I wanted desperately to see him, to talk to him. But marry him—I honestly did not know. Even dear mother with all her wonderful sympathy and understanding would not have understood the feeling I had but could not express.

Jennie, Mrs. Murphy, and finally I, had consented that Jim should know I expected him. They became all interest and excitement.

Saturday came, and with it a telegram.

"Reach New York late this afternoon. Will be with you this evening."

Mother tried to make me remain at home from the office. But as I never worked but half a day on Saturday I insisted upon going down as usual.

When I reached home about one o'clock mother had made the apartment spick and span, and had prepared a nice lunch for me.

"Now lie down and rest a while," she said as I finished. "Then you will be nice and fresh for this evening."

I tried to do as she suggested, but it was impossible to rest. I finally got up and put on my things and took a long walk. When I returned I felt strangely calm and rested. I dressed carefully in a dark blue

georgette crepe—the only really nice dress I had bought in years—afternoon dress, I mean. I always wore a tailored suit at the office.

Dinner time came and went My nervousness had not returned, and mother and I chatted as usual. After dinner I ran out to the corner and bought some flowers from the man whom I always patronized. He was lame, and his flowers were cheap, two reasons why I bought them of him.

I arranged them in a vase, then sat down with a late magazine to wait. The telephone rang:

"Hello!" I called.

"Mr. Cummings wished me to say that his train was late and he had consequently been delayed. He will be with you in half an hour. This is the Waldorf talking."

Only thirty minutes. Then I should see him. Would I find him changed? Would he have grown older, more sedate as had I? Or would he be the same entertaining, competent, masterful man he was in the time so long ago when he took me to lunch at a cheap restaurant without apology, although he knew I never had lunched in such a place. Would what I had to tell him make any difference? All he now knew was that we had lost our money. He knew nothing of my being suspected of theft; that I had worked in cheap eating houses, and that even now I was one of the great army of New York working girls.

"Men have such queer ideals," I said to mother as

we waited. "He may think I am working at something at home with you, or that I teach school, or some of the things men are apt to think are the really ladylike things for a girl to do if it becomes necessary for her to do anything."

"Aren't you borrowing trouble, dear?" mother asked in her quiet way.

"Yes, I guess I am!" I gave reply.

Then I sat very straight and still as the door bell rang loudly.

Mother opened the door. I heard voices. Then she said:

"You'll find her in there."

I rose but made no move toward the door. Then almost before I knew it I was in Clark's arms, his lips on mine, and a flood of happiness such as I never had known rushed over me.

"Dear one," he said, over and over again, as he smoothed my hair. "How have I lived so long without you?"

Then he held me off at arm's length to look at me, only after a moment to draw me again into closer embrace.

Finally, we became more calmly happy, and I called mother:

"You are not to be shut out. Is she, Clark?"

"No, indeed! I need her almost as badly as I do you. I never knew my mother. She died when I was born."

"You poor boy! You have no idea what you have

missed," I said gaily. "Mothers are the very best things in the whole wide world."

"And now you are to have one," mother added gently.

Clark told me many things about ranch life of which I never had heard. He described the place at the foot of the mountain where he slept under the stars and dreamed of me. His "trysting place," he called it. He told me of the dishonest overseer whose actions had kept him at home, and away from me. And then he told of the ranch house, describing it as only a man who loves his home can do.

"Now tell me of the horse and dog," I said, as he rested.

"Oh, they are waiting for you!" he answered, with a smile. "I told them you were coming."

"Of course they understood," I laughed.

"Of course," he answered, soberly.

And so we passed long, happy hours. Mother, too, seemed to share our happiness, and hovered around for all the world like a hen with her chicks.

I had insisted to both Clark and mother that I must go to work as usual on Monday. And after mother had bade us good-night I told Clark of all that had happened since I had seen him, and of all I owed my employer.

Clark, as I had expected, was very masterful.

"You have been very brave, very independent," he said. "You have borne and suffered enough. Now I shall bear and suffer for both if there is suffering

to be borne. You must marry me this week and let me take you home—to our home," he added softly as he drew me into his arms.

"Oh, I couldn't, so soon!" I exclaimed.

"Why not?"

He asked the question in so practical a tone that I laughed.

"But, Clark—I'm not ready, and——"

"Not ready? What is there to get ready? You love me, I love you. We have decided to spend our lives together. Isn't that all there is to it?"

"But I must tell Mr. Hunt, and give him time to get some one to fill my place." My heart sank as I thought of the task before me.

"A week is long enough for him. More than he has any right to expect. And I'm not going to let you work all the week either. Tell him in the morning. Then if he doesn't tell you to quit, I'll talk to him."

Clark looked so belligerent when he said that, I laughed merrily.

"A lot you know about it, you rancher."

"Yes, I am a rancher, and proud to be one. And you will soon be a rancheress. I hope you will be proud, too."

In the morning I felt my enthusiasm ooze from me as I remembered that I must tell Kenneth Hunt—this man whom I knew loved me devotedly—that I was to be married, and so soon. What would he say? How would he accept the news I was to take to him?

"Don't worry, dear, it will all come out right,"

mother said, as I bade her good-bye. She had read my thoughts, and was giving me courage. But it was with none of my usual breeziness that I entered the office that Monday morning, and waited for Kenneth Hunt to appear.

"Mr. Hunt," I began in a faint voice, "I want to leave as soon as possible, but at the end of the week anyway."

I had not looked at him as I spoke, but now as I glanced up I saw his face whiten.

"Leave—why?" he asked.

"I am going to be married."

I had blurted out my reason crudely. I well knew it would hurt him, but there was no other way—not with him.

"Married!" he exclaimed, and even his lips grew white, while his face took on a gray tone. "May I ask who——"

"Please do, and let me tell you all about it," I interrupted. "It is some one I knew long ago when dad was with us—a western man, a rancher. That is what he calls himself. He has cared for me for years," I went on, rather hesitatingly. I knew the man listening also had cared for a long time. "He is here and wants to take me back with him."

"In a week," his voice was low and husky.

"Yes."

"I hope you will be very happy, Sheila. Will you remember that always you have one friend, that nothing can alter that? Will you promise to come

to me if ever you should need such a friend?"

"I promise," I said solemnly, then almost laughed aloud as I remembered that Clark years ago had exacted the same promise. Did all men offer to be a friend to the girl they loved when she could not marry them? I know my laughter was a bit hysterical, for he said:

"One never knows what the future will bring. I hope it will bring you all good things; but if it shouldn't and you need me, why, I shall be here."

He asked me several questions about my plans, then said:

"Now, put on your things and run home. You will have many things to do if you are to leave New York in a week."

"But I don't want to leave you this way. It isn't right."

"The new girl is doing very well. I shall take her over and let Rogers get another. In all save the cotton she will answer."

"And the cotton?" I asked.

And as I did so I couldn't help a thrill of pride that I had made myself so necessary in this one branch of his business.

"I shall have to attend to that myself for the present."

The rest of the morning was taken up with showing the new girl what she would be expected to do, talking over the cotton market, and tabulating the data I had ready so Kenneth Hunt would find it of

help after I had gone. Just as I finished he came into the office,

"You may go now," he said. "May I call before you leave? I should like to bid you and your mother good-bye."

I had told him that my mother was going to Chicago to live with Harold.

"Indeed you may," I replied.

"Thank you. I shall surely see you before you go."

He smiled at me, but his voice was still husky, and his eyes sad. I felt a lump in my throat as I turned away. I realized for the first time how very much I liked this man, how much he had meant in my life for the last two years.

Going home in the subway I cried a little; but the thought of Clark soon dried my tears, and it was a very happy girl who ran up the stairs and into the little apartment where mother and I had been so comfortable together.

"Why, dear——" mother said, astonished.

"Home for good, mother mine! I'm not to go back to the office any more," I replied, gleefully.

Yet as the words left my lips I sobered. I would miss the office. My responsibilities. Why, I would scarcely know what to do with myself when deprived of the routine of business life.

But, as Kenneth Hunt had said, there was much to do; and little time to do it in. Clark spent most of the time with us. He packed and crated the things

I was to take, and the few mother would want in her home with Harold. Some we would give to Jennie; the rest we would sell.

Clark was so tender, so loving, so evidently happy, that the time fairly flew. I had not tried to buy any trousseau. He had laughed when I spoke of it. A rancher's wife only needed the simple clothes I already had. But I added a few things, which meant a little shopping.

I came in late one afternoon, loaded with bundles, to find Kenneth Hunt sitting with mother. Clark had left before he arrived, they told me, but Kenneth was waiting for me.

Kenneth only remained a few moments. He looked old, and some way I felt to blame. Yet I could not be sad when I thought of Clark, and so I chatted away telling our plans.

"We are going to the ranch at once," I said in answer to a question. "Mr. Cummings feels he cannot be spared longer. Then, too, it will be so novel, so different from anything I ever have known, that I can well afford to dispense with the usual wedding trip."

I blushed furiously as I finished.

"I am sure you will find it interesting. The West is a wonderful country," he answered rather stiltedly.

Then he said: "I trust you may be very happy, Sheila," and I knew he meant it.

When I told Jennie and Jim their astonishment was amusing.

"You don't really mean you are going to be mar-

ried Sunday?" Jennie almost shouted. "And that you are going right away, way out West?"

"Yes, Jennie. And some time you must bring my little namesake to see me. I imagine ranches are good places for children."

"It's the sly thing you are!" Mrs. Murphy exclaimed when I told her. "The way you've kept it to yourself all these years."

"I wasn't sure I would marry him, you know," I replied.

"Oh, you wasn't! Well, I hope you'll be happy. There's them that won't be, I'm a thinkin'!"

I knew she referred to Kenneth Hunt, who was a great favorite with her.

When I told Clark he laughed, and as his arms closed about me, he said:

"Of course we'll be happy, dearest. We are going to be together."

Sunday came, my wedding day.

Although January, the air was soft and the sun shone brilliantly.

"Happy is the bride the sun shines on," I said aloud as I sprang out of bed. Our things had all gone and mother and I were spending the last night at Jennie's. I could hear them talking and knew I had overslept.

"I'll be out in a minute," I shouted to them, opening the door on a crack.

"All right," Jennie answered, "your breakfast is all ready."

I laughed softly to myself as I dressed; laughed from sheer happiness. I was to have none of the pomp and show at my wedding that I would have had if I had married Clark when he asked me first, when dad was alive and we had money. But I was marrying the same man, and after all that was what mattered—the man. Nothing else counted.

We were very gay over the breakfast. Before we finished, Mrs. Murphy came in and brought me a lovely pair of Dresden candlesticks.

"I wanted to git you a lamp with a lovely green shade, but I thought it was too big. Then you can put them sticks most anywheres. That farmhouse maybe wouldn't have no place for a big lamp."

Jennie had given me some lovely table covers; and Kenneth Hunt and his brother had sent me a chest of silver. A wonderful gift. I was glad they both sent it. Mother was delighted.

"Just what I should have given you if I could," she said to me.

At four o'clock Clark and I were married. We walked to the little Protestant church just around the corner, and with only Jennie, Jim, Mrs. Murphy and mother as witnesses I became Mrs. Clark Cummings.

I was married in my blue georgette crepe, a small toque to match with a band of fur, and a long blue coat of broadcloth with fur collar and cuffs.

We went directly to the train, mother accompanying us. She would remain with Jennie for a day or

two, then she, too, would leave for Chicago, and Harold.

After we had bidden her good-bye and the train had started Clark took me in his arms and whispered:

"My little wife, all mine now."

And as the train rushed us along, away from all that I had ever known, I couldn't help wondering what was to come to me in the future. I wondered, but had no fear.

CHAPTER XXIV

We had planned to stop in Chicago a day, where we would see Harold. Then, while Clark attended to some business, Harold and I could have a real visit without his new brother-in-law intruding. That was Clark's way of putting it.

Harold was delighted to see me, yet he couldn't hide the fact that he had been surprised at my marrying Clark so suddenly.

"You must remember he first asked me long ago when daddy was with us," I told Harold. "And he says he has been waiting all this time."

"I was sure it was going to be that Mr. Hunt," Harold replied.

"You, too! It's a wonder some of you didn't succeed in marrying me to him whether he wanted me or not. Even Mrs. Murphy was disappointed. But you see she doesn't know Clark."

"Oh, Cummings is all right! I am very well pleased with my new relative. But that Hunt was a corker! From all indications you could have had him if you wanted to."

"Don't be too sure of that," I parried. Some way I felt a little hurt. Not that Harold meant to make a comparison. But he had.

We stayed all night in Chicago, and in the evening Harold, Clark, and I went to the theater. I enjoyed it immensely. Clark, seeing my enthusiasm, said:

"I'm sorry, but it will be a long time before we can see a good play again."

"Don't they grow plays on your ranch?" Harold joked. "I thought you raised everything."

"Almost everything," Clark returned, smiling at Harold.

"I am fond of the theater," I admitted. "I always have been."

After the play we went to a gay restaurant for supper. Clark again said:

"Have a good time, Sheila, we'll stay as long as you like. You won't see anything like this on the ranch."

"Don't grow cafés, either, eh?" Harold broke in. "You better stay in Chicago, sis. I'll take you to the theater, and occasionally, when I can stretch my pocketbook, to a café for supper."

"No, thank you, Harold. I prefer the ranch without them, to them without Clark."

They both laughed at my little speech, and Clark squeezed my hand under the table. I thought of our conversation that night in Chicago many times in the next year. At first with a smile, later with a wonder in my heart.

The next morning we started on the last part of our journey. Clark told me everything of interest in the country through which we passed. It was

a new country to me. I enjoyed his descriptions of the places and people.

"I never shall be bored with so interesting a companion," I thought more than once.

The ranch, Clark had told me, was some sixteen miles from the station. It seemed a dreadful way to one who always had counted distances by city blocks. But he laughed when I said so, and assured me:

"Miles out here don't mean anything. I have a high-powered car. We shall be at home, our home, dearest, before you realize it. One of the Chinese boys will meet us."

"Won't it seem funny to have Chinese as servants! I am not sure that I won't be a bit afraid of them."

"They make very good servants. Ching, my cook, is an exceptional one. He has been with me a long time; ever since my housekeeper grew too told to do the work. I hope you will like them all, Sheila. They are a part of the ranch."

"So you grow Mexicans and Chinese if you don't grow plays and cafés?" I said.

"Yes, and I wish I might grow everything to make you happy."

It was not quite dusk when we reached the ranch. The ranch house, a long, low, but attractive-looking building, was just as I had pictured it from the description Clark had given me on the train. Any one would know he loved his home; that it meant more than just a pile of wood and stone to him. His voice took on a different cadence when he spoke of his life

on the ranch. That he had been alone and solitary much of the time seemed not to have made the slightest difference.

As the ranch car which had met us at the station drew up to the wide veranda with an announcing honk-honk of the horn the door opened and a flood of light from the broad hall enveloped us. In the door stood a grinning Chinese boy. Just back of the boy in the door was an old Mexican woman. She had lived with Clark for years, but now was unable to do much work, so he depended upon the Chinese.

"How different it all is," I thought, as Clark helped me out of the car and up the broad steps, all the time whispering words of love and welcome.

The hall floor was strewn with skins, trophies of Clark's hunting trips. On the walls were pictures of dogs and horses. But before I had time to notice anything more, I heard a shrill barking, and a queer-looking black dog with a big head, short legs, and a long tail came rushing toward us, leaping up on his hind feet and barking his welcome.

"Allow me to introduce Bobby Burns," Clark said, laughingly, as he bade him be quiet. "Shake hands with your new mistress, Bobby."

I put out my hand, and one little black paw was immediately lifted, while the big head was cocked one side in so comical a manner that I laughed heartily.

"He's a dear!" I exclaimed. "I know we shall be great friends, sha'n't we, Bobby Burns?"

A wag of his tail and something very like a wink were my answer.

"Come, dear. I'll show you your room, then by the time you have rested, dinner will be ready. Ching's feelings will be hurt if we are late. I imagine from his face he has made great preparations."

"Oh, how lovely!" I exclaimed, as Clark threw open a door.

A large room with many windows—afterward I said that the house was all windows—done in soft gray and rose. Dainty furniture of ivory and a carpet of rose, with hangings of the same tones as the wall, greeted me. Never since I had left my lovely home after dad died had I had such a room.

Clark beamed as he saw my pleasure.

"It kept me away from you several days so you must like it. It meant great self-sacrifice for me."

He then opened another door, and showed me the bath room, and a dressing room.

"These are all yours to lock yourself in and me out, when you feel so disposed. I hope it won't be often," he finished, smiling.

"Now, here is my room," and he threw open another connecting door. A room large as mine, but severely plain, and furnished in dark wood. Skins like those in the hall were thrown on the floor. But what most attracted my attention were the books. There was not a bit of wall space not taken with doors and windows that was not filled with books. Built-in cases held them.

"What a nice room, and what a lot of books!" I said, as Clark struck a match and touched it to the logs laid in the huge fireplace. In a moment the flames were leaping and the logs crackling and Clark was laughing at me because I clapped my hands with delight. I never had seen such a fireplace or such a fire. No wonder I was pleased.

"Come, dear, we must get ready for dinner," he said. "You have a whole lifetime to inspect your home. Come. We mustn't hurt Ching's feelings to-night."

That was one of Clark's most lovable traits, his unwillingness to injure any one's feelings, no matter how lowly the person might be. So I hurried into my room, where I found the old Mexican woman waiting to help me. My trunk was unstrapped, and some of the things already laid on the bed.

I selected a white dress, a simple girlish thing which mother had chosen for me. I would wear all white the first evening in my new home. I had been somberly dressed as a bride, but I would be like a bride for this my first dinner.

So I bathed and dressed. I put on white stockings and slippers, and my white dress. Then I found some white artificial flowers, an old corsage bouquet, and tucked them into my hair. I was all ready when Clark called.

"Sweetheart," he said, "you are lovely to-night."

"Do I look like a bride?" I questioned, anxious to be all that was desirable in his eyes.

I never shall forget that first night in my ranch home. The dinner was delicious and well served. Clark was so tender, so loving, that I had for the first time in my life a sense of real importance. I was the mistress of this lovely old ranch house.

The dining room was plainly furnished but comfortable. The big living room to which we adjourned after dinner was also plainly furnished, but its great fireplace like the one above in Clark's room, the piano and victrola gave it an air of luxury. Books were here, too; books and magazines scattered everywhere.

"What a reader you must be," I said to Clark, as he smoked his pipe.

"The evenings are long and a man must do something," he said.

"But what a lot you must know! I shall be a bit afraid of so learned a husband."

"I sha'n't read so much now," he returned, as he gave me a loving look.

I was all for going over the rest of the house that night. But he urged me to wait until morning. So we spent our first evening sitting quietly by the fire, talking in low voices of intimate things, of the past, and, most of all, the future.

My delight in my new home did not wane as the days passed. The weather suddenly turned bitterly cold, and I was much indoors. But I kept amused by studying all about my possessions, getting acquainted with the household, and learning a little about ranch life.

"You'll have to wait until summer before you will really appreciate the ranch," Clark told me.

I made Tomboy's acquaintance, and had had several short canters on his back. He was a beauty. I planned long rides when the weather was favorable.

I think, too, that this life of inaction was welcome for a time because of the way I had been working. I really had been very tired; mother had been right when she said I needed a rest. And this old ranch house was just the place to rest.

When April came we commenced to take our long rides about the ranch and out into the country. Clark took me to his favorite nook at the foot of the mountains, and we planned to bring a tent and sleep there as soon as the weather would permit. I was glad of these excursions. I had begun to feel restless, to chafe under the idle life I led. Until I became rested I never thought much of my work, of the office. But after I was thoroughly rested the thought of my busy days when I was of use would often intrude.

Once again I began to watch the financial markets, cotton especially. I persuaded Clark to subscribe for magazines and papers that would keep me posted, although they were, of course, old when we received them. He laughed at my reviving interest and often teased me about my knowledge of the cotton market.

But with the coming of warm weather all was forgotten save the joy of living. I still read the papers

and magazines, but perfunctorily and not with the zest of other days.

We rode and we camped. Clark taught me to shoot. I went to the round-ups of the cattle, and became so accustomed to the branding that I could watch without flinching.

I was as happy as the days were long, and those summer days when twilight lingered until sleep closed my eyes were very long. I did nothing in the ranch house. Why should I? Clark's servants were very capable, much more than I was; so why should I interfere?

I had learned that I had been right when I said that the mountains and plains were real living companions to Clark. Sometimes I was, even as I had said, frightened at the vastness, the bigness of the things which he so loved.

I remembered what he had said of its immensity, that he loved it while it appalled. Its fascination held me, too, but not in the same way it did him. To me it was the newness, the strangeness, while to him it was the closeness, the knowing it so well, that made it his own.

One night we camped at the base of "his big mountain," as I called it. In the morning he insisted that I bathe in the same clear, running stream of which he had written me. He was like a boy in his delight. I had not the heart to say so, but I much preferred my bath at home, where I had fresh clothing and a cup of chocolate while I was dressing.

But I said nothing of such thoughts as these to Clark. And most of that long, lazy summer I was happy. Not deliriously happy, as I had dreamed I would be, but peacefully content, riding, walking, shooting, until when night came I was glad to go to bed and sleep.

Yet I love to think that Clark was happy that summer. In view of much that came after it comforts me.

The long, happy summer at last drew to a close, a chill was in the air, and I no longer enjoyed sleeping outdoors. I came back from the long rides chilled, and, because of that, cross. As the winter came on I grew uneasy and restless. I wandered from room to room, upsetting their orderly neatness for the sake of putting them again in order. I read my papers avidly. I visualized again and again the office where I had spent so much of my time, and where I was always interested in something. I followed the cotton market as closely as I did when it was part of my business to know the changes and fluctuations. I pushed the thought back for a long time, but finally I began to wonder how I was to get through the long winter.

I was bored, bored almost to death. It was not that I had ceased to love Clark, not by any means. We were yet to have our first quarrel. We had disagreed sometimes, especially when I began to give my discontented thoughts rein. He was so thoroughly satisfied with life as we lived it, so sure of

himself and—of me, that at times it almost angered me. His ranch, his horses, dogs, and books—and I completely filled his life.

"Why are you so restless?" he asked one night after dinner.

He was reading and smoking his pipe as usual, while I paced up and down the room, occasionally looking out into the gloom as I passed a window.

"I guess when one has been a business woman, gone regularly to business, and has been perfectly independent, and had something to fill every hour of the day, it is apt to make one restless," I replied, then flushed hotly.

Was that the reason I was so discontented? "Once a business woman always a business woman," I had heard some one say long ago and now it recurred to me.

Clark laughed.

"You ought to be glad to be away from a stuffy office," he said, and resumed his reading.

"The office was never stuffy," I retorted, but he did not hear.

Finally, I, too, took a magazine and tried to read. But always back in my mind was the thought that I missed the office, my work. No thought of Kenneth Hunt, no slightest feeling against Clark was in my mind; just that I missed my work.

In the days that came I constantly thought of the office. My reading grew more and more confined to daily papers, some of them almost a week old when

we got them, and to financial reports wherever I could find them.

As my interest in these subjects grew and was fed, so I lost interest in my home and the things around me. I fretted inside constantly. That I said nothing to Clark made me fret the more. Had I talked it all out when the thought of my work first came to me as a thing to be desired, I should probably have dismissed it from my mind, but the longer I thought of it the more it seemed to me that I must—sometime—that's the way I thought of it—sometime go back to it. I made no plans, but constantly there grew a longing to give up the idle life I led, a life with nothing of interest in it for me. I thought I would be happier to take up the old life again, the life of a worker instead of an idler in the world.

It never occurred to me that, if I would, there was work ready at my hand. That I might easily keep occupied during the long winter months in learning to be a good housekeeper. Had it, I doubt if I would have long entertained it in the mood I then was in.

By the time Christmas had rolled around I had succeeded in making myself believe that I could never be happy as a married woman. But how in the world should I tell Clark—how make him understand? As the holidays grew near we had many little disagreements. Once or twice we had quarreled. And for the first time I had turned the key in the gray and rose room. But usually our lives moved along with scarcely a ripple on the surface. One day was just

like another. The nearest town was sixteen miles away, and it wasn't much of a town at that. But when I became too restless I would ask Clark to take me to the moving pictures in that town. Sometimes he would do so willingly. At other times, if he had an interesting book or was busy with the ranch accounts, he would refuse. But always kindly.

Often I wished he would not be so gentle—so kind to me. If he would only do something to give me an excuse to go back. But as December passed, then January, I felt I could endure it no longer. I must go or I would go mad.

I have no excuse to make for my actions. But I was a city girl. The life on the ranch once the newness had worn away was almost unbearable in its loneliness. Clark had men to look after and his great herds of cattle. He had a house full of books in which he was interested, while I—I had only him. And he was not enough.

I had not come to this conclusion—that my husband was not sufficient to fill my life without a struggle. There were days when I was in agony at the thought of living without him; other days when I felt that the lonely ranch life was closing in upon me and strangling my very soul. I grew thin, lost my appetite, and moped listlessly about the house, miserable and unhappy.

For a time I kept up a semblance of happiness and gaiety before Clark, but that, too, soon became an effort too great to continue. I begged mother to

visit me, but Harold had not been very well and she hesitated to leave him. So I dragged along day after day, growing more discontented, more miserable all the time.

No one can know how I longed for my old work, how I fairly ate up any news that had to do with it. There was a typewriter in the office of the ranch, and sometimes at night when Clark was deep in a book I would steal out and for an hour practise so that I would not lose my speed.

Sometimes in the middle of the night, when Clark was sleeping soundly, I would get up and, wrapping a warm wrapper around me, stand by the window and gaze out at the wide stretches of land, at the mountains rising black and forbidding in the distance, and, with a shudder, long for little old New York Here all was sameness and gloom. There all was hurry, bustle, and light.

I was a product of cities. I did not know how to adapt myself to the new, the strangely lonely life that now was mine. The very things that appealed to Clark repelled me. He loved the loneliness, I hated it. He cared nothing for people, and I loved crowds. I wish I could have made Clark understand what it meant to a metropolite like me to be shut away from my kind, with only him, an old Mexican woman, and two Chinese boys for company. But I couldn't. He seemed unable to grasp the fact that I craved any society but his. He was satisfied, happy. I should be—but I wasn't!

Even in my most pitiful times in New York I had not been as lonely as I was in my beautiful ranch house. At least, I rubbed elbows with humans there. Here the loneliness, the stillness were at times appalling. I felt I would go mad. I wanted to smash things, to throw things. Perhaps if I had I should have been rid of something that seethed within me.

I used to wonder what ailed me—if I were different from other girls—or if it were only my busy life that had made me so. I had been married only a little over a year to the man I still loved, yet I was so dissatisfied that I was thinking of leaving him.

More than once had the remembrance of Kenneth Hunt's parting words come to me. I knew my old place would be mine; that I could go back to the same dear office and to my same work. Oh, if only I could have taken Clark with me. But once when I proposed he leave the ranch until spring he had been so shocked that I had not mentioned it again.

Sometimes I was tempted to ask:

"Clark, why did you marry me to bury me out here?" but it would do no good to question. He wouldn't understand. He, a nature worshipper, could not conceive of nature getting on one's nerves. There had come to be revolt in both my face and actions. I even prayed at times, "Save me, oh, God, for the waters have come in even unto my soul." And at times I would feel a strange content—I hoped that God had answered my prayer.

But such content did not last. The reaction, too, was always the greater. So one night along the first of February I told Clark. I had seen one man with the pallor of death on his face because of me, and now I saw another. One man's voice had become husky with pain, and now another voice took on the same tone. Strangely he did not try to dissuade me. He listened, his head on his hand, his pipe fallen from between his lips, until I had finished. Then he said:

"You are sure you want to go, Sheila?"

"Yes, Clark."

"And you have not ceased to love me you say."

"No, Clark. But I can't endure the idleness, the loneliness. I want to work; to accomplish something. I know I can. I feel it in here." I laid my hand on my breast. "You know I was only beginning to be useful when you came. I want to go on. I want to be a worker, not a drone."

"And you are willing to give up all this, your home—me, for that?"

"I must, Clark! I feel caged, stifled. The things in which you delight are ashes in my mouth. I shall go mad if you don't let me go."

"I shall not prevent you, Sheila."

CHAPTER XXV

When Clark said he would not prevent me his tone brought tears to my eyes, while it also brought an intense throb of joy. I had thought he would seek to dissuade me or even forbid me. But that he would acquiesce so easily I never had dared hope. I well knew it had not been easy for him, and I wondered if I really knew my husband after all.

I said nothing more for a day or two, but quietly began to get ready. Then after dinner was over, as once again we sat before the fire, Clark said:

"When do you want to go, Sheila?" This time his voice was steady, and he had not grown pale; but there were great dark shadows under his eyes. I could scarcely look at him without tears coming, yet I would not give up to the feeling of compassion. I couldn't if I were to leave him; and leave him I must.

"As soon as possible, Clark," I answered. "I have written Jennie."

"You will stay with her?"

"For the present, yes."

I thought I heard something like a sigh of content from Clark, but was not sure. I knew, however, from his expression that he did not disapprove.

"I will take you to the station Friday. I have to go to town for supplies."

And so it was settled. Does it seem strange that we talked so little about so important a step? At the time it did, even to me. But afterward—afterward I knew we couldn't talk. The thing was too big. But on the way to the station—I had spent the morning bidding Tomboy and all the places I loved about the ranch house good-bye, Bobby Burns was going with me and was in a crate in the back of the car—I said:

"If you want to, Clark, you can——" I stopped, frightened by the look on his face. He had read my very thoughts and replied harshly:

"Don't talk of that! I can't bear it!" and a groan broke from his white lips. "If ever the time comes when you want to be free, let me know—but not now!"

Had Clark asked me then I would have gone back with him. But he only set his mouth grimly and drove all the faster toward the station.

He had timed himself so there was but few moments to wait, and those were so occupied in attending to my luggage, in seeing that Bobby Burns was comfortably cared for, that we only had a moment in which to say good-bye.

Clark took both my hands and held them close, as he said in a voice I scarcely could recognize:

"Good-bye until I see you again, Sheila. But remember I am waiting for you."

Tears blinded me. When he released my hands I threw my arms about his neck and pressed my lips to his. He grew pale as death as he unwound my arms, and in a matter-of-fact way picked up my bag and helped me into the train, found me a seat—I changed for a sleeper further on—put an envelope into my hand, then left me.

I waved as long as the station was in view, but I saw Clark but dimly because of my tears. I would have gone back with him had he asked me when at the station I had kissed him. But he was wise. He knew that to go back would only make it harder for both of us.

After a while I wiped my eyes and began to think of the future—my future. I opened the envelope he had given me and a check for a hundred dollars fell out.

"You will receive the same amount each month," was written on a slip of paper.

Then and there I made up my mind never to use the money Clark sent me. I had left him to become independent, to work. I would be independent. Then, too, I knew that he could ill afford to send me that amount. He was putting many improvements on the ranch, some of them because of me, and he needed all the money he could raise to continue. I couldn't send back the check and others he might send me, but I could and would save them all for him.

So a little over a year after I left New York I was back again!

"You and I, Bobby Burns," I said aloud as the taxi hurried me to Jennie. Then a guilty feeling came to me because of the dog. I had been selfish to take him. Clark loved him, he had been such a companion to him. So I ordered the cabby to turn around and I readdressed the box and sent Bobby Burns back to his master. I also sent a telegram explaining my reason.

Jennie just took me in her arms and never asked a question; nor did Jim, nor later when she found I was back did Mrs. Murphy. I knew of course that it was owing to Jennie that she did not, for every time I saw her her eyes reminded me of two big question marks.

That very first day I called up the office. I dared not wait for fear my courage would ooze from me. Every thought of Clark was misery to me. I had left him of my own free will, and now that I no longer saw his sad, hollow eyes I wasn't really quite sure that I loved him—that I ever had loved him as I thought I had. I was tempted to take the next train back—that was why I telephoned Kenneth Hunt.

After his first gasp of surprise, a gasp I plainly heard over the telephone, in reply to my question:

"Is my old place available or have you a place for me?" he calmly replied:

"Your old place will be yours."

"I will be there in the morning," I had answered.

So it was made easy for me to slip back into the old groove.

That evening I wrote mother. She could tell Harold as much or as little as she wished.

"I am back and shall take my old position to-morrow," I told her. "I have not written before, as I felt that nothing I could say would make my action quite plain to you. It surely would not were you other than you are. We have had no quarrel, Clark and I. No real disagreement. But the things he loves I hate. It had become an obsession with me. Had I not come away I should have gone mad. I had the most insane desire to throw things—to break anything at hand. The great black mountains seemed to cast a spell over me. The loneliness of it all makes me shudder as I write. I wrote Clark once, and told him I loved life and people. It should have made him hesitate to make me his wife and doom me to solitude. We still love each other—I think. He says he will wait for me. Shall I ever return? I can hear you think the question if you do not ask it. Frankly I don't know —perhaps, perhaps not.

"I am with Jennie. She has just accepted the condition and has asked no questions. There is nothing that I could tell her that she would understand—nothing. So I have not tried. Jim, too, has been wonderful. I telephoned Mr. Hunt. I am to go right back in my old position. I begin to feel almost as if I never had been married—and so soon. I wonder if you will understand just the least bit, mother mine? If you will realize that I could not stay?

"Then, too, the longing to get to work urged me

on. I had only just got where I felt that I was of use when I went away with Clark. The business I had learned only made me want to put it to use and to learn more. I missed the getting up and hustling out in the morning. The crowded subway, even, will be like shaking hands with an old friend when once more I ride in it.

"The cheap lunch room, too, where I used to sit on a stool and eat my simple luncheon and watch the groups of working girls and listen to their chatter, will be welcome. How glad I shall be to go there again. I wonder who has my old stool back in a corner where I could see and not be too plainly seen myself.

"Do all these trifling matters seem too little to have given up my beautiful home and my husband for? Remember, if they do that it was not any one thing for which I did it; but all the little things combined. Some day I may be sorry and grieve. Just now I feel free again, free, and almost happy. I never expect to be quite happy again. How could I? But I shall be busy every minute of my waking hours. On the train I planned a course of study in economics—that thing which interests me and so will make me forget Clark. Not forget his kindness, his love for me, but his sad face, and the knowledge that I have hurt him. That I must forget.

"This is a long letter, mother, yet I feel I have told you very little. I shall be anxious until I hear from you. I hope Harold is over his cold and that

you and he are as happy together as were you and I only a little over a year ago.

"Good-bye, precious mother,

"SHEILA."

I had arranged to board with Jennie, and a nice hot breakfast was on the table. I ran to the window before I sat down. Even at that early hour the streets were teeming with life. And with a little happy laugh I took my place at the table. It was good to see people, human beings instead of long bare stretches of land and bleak mountains.

It was a briskly cold, clear morning, and the short walk from the subway to the office made my cheeks glow and the blood race through my veins. I was so glad to feel alive once more that I forgot to speculate upon what I should tell Kenneth Hunt until I was in the elevator on my way to the office.

Rogers was still there. He was in the outer office when I went in. He looked up, and although his astonishment was very evident he said nothing more than to greet me pleasantly. I asked for his wife.

"She is very well, and the boy is fine," he said with pride.

I knew from his tone, his manner of speaking, that they were all right. That they were happy.

A girl I never had seen was sitting at her desk, and I wondered if she had been filling my place. Anyway, I liked her looks, and hoped I would not be the means of her being sent away.

Then I passed on into the old, familiar office. Kenneth Hunt was there and came to meet me.

"I am glad, Sheila; that is, if you are happy in coming back," he said.

The joy in his voice and eyes took my breath for a moment. He misunderstood—he must not. So I said:

"I don't know how long I shall stay. I had to come, but I haven't left Clark. You mustn't think that. It is simply that I can't endure the solitude; can't like the things he does." I finished so lamely I feared he would think me very foolish.

"I understand. You have decided that it will be better to live apart for a time, but—may I ask just one question?"

"As many as you will," I answered meekly.

"Only one. Was it necessary for you to—do this?" He motioned toward the desk on which stood the same old typewriter.

"No—far from it!" I hastened to say. "Clark gives me all that is necessary. But I wanted the work, the excitement of the markets. I could not live if I were idle." But not even him would I tell that I had no intention of using Clark's money. That I was going to put it away and some time return it.

"Thank you. Now we'll get to work."

In a few moments I was at work taking his dictation as if I never had been away.

"You are still efficient," he smiled.

"I have practiced lately," I responded.

It was really wonderful how I came to feel that I had never been away. What Kenneth had said to Rogers I never knew, but no questions were asked, no curious looks cast in my direction. My place had been waiting, and I had slipped into it; that was all.

So it was with Jennie and Jim. No reference was made that could disquiet me, and nothing said about my affairs. Little Sheila was a godsend to me, in that she took up much of my time out of the office. She was such a dear, so cunning, and good as gold.

"She couldn't help it with such a mother," Jim had declared when I made the remark. I felt a sudden lump in my throat. These two simple souls in their tiny flat with their baby were all in all to each other. While I——

As spring drew near I felt less and less like going out. More and more like staying in my room, playing with Sheila, or reading.

In spite of my lassitude I felt all my old interest in the cotton market, and did all the work in that department. I would be very proud and happy when Mr. Hunt came to me for statistics or any information about my specialty, and I was able to give it to him unhesitatingly. The market had been very active all the spring. That particular branch of the firm's business had increased enormously. Kenneth Hunt told me one day that it was in a great measure due to the accurate information he was able to give his customers about the crop—information I had collected.

One thing worried me.

As the days passed I realized that Kenneth Hunt was still hoping that something would keep me in New York—always. It is not egotistical to say that I knew he still cared for me. He showed it in many ways, especially when we were alone, although he never overstepped in any way. But his care, his thoughtfulness, the longing in his eyes when he thought himself unobserved, showed only too plainly that he had not forgotten.

He often sent flowers to the house, but as he never failed to remember Jennie I could not well object. Often, too, he bought something for my little namesake, and made it the excuse to call in the evening. He never remained long, an hour at most. But I felt guilty, although I knew I had in no way encouraged him, unless returning was encouragement.

Probably he thought I would tire of being in the condition I then was; that I would get a divorce. He never said so; but it was the only way I could be anything to him. I now knew that no matter what happened I should never willingly free myself from Clark. Just when I came to the decision it would be hard to tell. It was more of an impression than anything else, an indelible impression.

I was very comfortable with Jennie. I was treated like an honored guest instead of a boarder. The best of everything was saved for me, and all my objections only met with a laugh from Jennie.

She had grown plump, and prettier than ever, in

the year I had been away. Jim's salary had been raised, and they were getting along nicely. He had taken more insurance because he had two to provide for now instead of one. In every way he was a fine, manly fellow. I used to think as I watched him doing little things about the house to make it easier for Jennie, as I saw his tender care for her and little Sheila, that never again would I look askance at anyone who lacked education or society manners.

How nice it was to be with such dear people! This would be the thought which would come when the memory of Clark made me uneasy. And it was nice. I was a very fortunate girl.

One day Jennie and I left Sheila with Mrs. Murphy and called on some of the people we had known when we first met in the little restaurant.

Mr. Arnold was delighted to see us. He was still the manager, but now of a chain of restaurants, instead of only one. He knew I was married, and thought I was on for a visit. We did not undeceive him. He asked very kindly after Clark, and was interested in what I told him of the ranch.

We hunted up Agnes Maloney, the donor of Jennie's awful red and green lamp; Annie Malley, another guest at Jennie's wedding, and then Minnie Rolfe. She was the girl who helped clear up the theft in the department store of which I was accused.

We found that she had a much better position in a small shop. She was well dressed and looked prosperous.

"I knew you'd get on," Jennie told her. "You always were square, and them kind gets along some way."

She then invited Minnie up to dinner with us. She quickly accepted and we had a really jolly evening, playing cards and then popping corn. Jennie and Jim still kept up their simple pleasures. There was no straining after effect; no doing anything they couldn't afford.

Minnie stayed until ten o'clock. When she left she said:

"I wish I could help you again, Miss Sheila. I think you need help more than you did before."

I made no reply save to kiss her good-night. Nothing had been said of me or my affairs. But this girl with a kindly human heart had sensed my need of help even before I myself was scarcely aware of it.

That night I dreamed of Clark. Dreamed I was back on the ranch with him and Tomboy and Bobby Burns.

"I'm going to spend to-morrow (Sunday) with Mrs. Murphy," I told Jennie. "She feels hurt that I haven't been to stay with her any length of time."

"Don't let her question you, Sheila. She would like to know all about things—about you, I mean."

I got up early and hurried over to the old rooming house where I had been so kindly treated when I needed kindness. I had planned to go to church with Mrs. Murphy, and fortunately caught her just as she

was leaving the house. She was delighted when I told her I was a self-invited guest for the day.

"Sure and it's good for sore eyes to see you. I had begun to think you had forgotten me, or that you was ashamed of the old Irishwoman."

"You thought no such thing!" I declared, pretending to be cross. "You know I love you dearly, and I have hurried so I could go to church with you. Now, aren't you ashamed?"

"Indade I am, and I'll say an extra prayer on account of it," she replied, a twinkle in her eye.

We walked to church. It was not far and the morning was pleasant. We talked a little of mother and of the time when I first came to New York. I told of our visits of the day before, and she was as interested as I could desire.

"Sure that Mr. Arnold was in love with you," she interrupted.

"He is doing finely," I told her. "He manages several restaurants now instead of one."

"Glory be! I should think one was plenty. This feedin' people is awful. Many times I think I'll go back to just roomers, like I was when you come to me. But they all raise such a howl when I say so that I go right on killin' myself and gettin' no thanks for it."

"You know better than that. They all know you are a wonderful cook, and that they would have a hard time getting as good food as you give them," I replied, just as we arrived at church.

The service was beautiful. Although a Protestant, the forms and ceremonies of the Catholic Church always had appealed to me. This morning they were restful. I listened to the lovely music, to the prayers; and a calmness I had not felt for days came over me.

After the services were over we walked home.

"Now you set right down, dearie, while I see if the dinner is all right. That girl is pretty fair, but I have to watch her like a cat or she burns things."

She disappeared into the kitchen.

I sat in a big comfortable chair and gazed around the old familiar room. At the picture of Murphy, who would have been all right if it hadn't been for his "drap too much" at the wax flowers under glass, symbolic of her grief for the departed Murphy, at the carpet with its great bouquets of red roses in green baskets, now faded until they were not quite so glaring, and I felt that this was my home—one of my homes where I would always be welcomed without question.

"Bring it right in here," Mrs. Murphy's voice interrupted my musings.

"Oh, are we to have dinner in here by ourselves?" I asked gleefully, as Mrs. Murphy with a cloth and napkins and the girl with a tray came into the room.

"Of course we are; you don't suppose I'm going to let you eat with them boarders when you only come once a year, do you? You and me will take our dinner with only Pat to look at us," she replied as

she glanced up at his picture, "and he won't have much to say, I'm a-thinkin'."

I jumped up and helped lay the table. Mrs. Murphy had made just the dessert I liked—a big, dark, yellow pumpkin pie.

"Them boarders always have to have chicken on Sunday; they'd kick if they didn't!" she told me as she put the whole breast on my plate. There were mashed potatoes and peas, the baking powder biscuits split and laid around the edge of the platter swimming like little boats in the rich gravy, just the kind of a dinner one wants when hungry, and I did full justice to it. Afterward we sat talking until dark. To my surprise, she asked no questions, not by a hint did she betray any curiosity about my affairs. But, when at last I left her, she took me in her motherly arms as if I were a little child, and said:

"Remember, Sheila, darlin', as long as I have a roof over me head it is yours too. It has been like a streak of sunshine to have you to-day. Come when you feel like it. Pat and me will always be glad to see you. Won't we, Pat?" she asked of Murphy's picture.

CHAPTER XXVI

Does it seem that I am slipping over the weeks and months without recording their happenings? If so, the only excuse I have is that there was nothing to record. I went to the office each morning, did my work, and returned at night. Aside from the outings of which I have told you I went nowhere. Kenneth Hunt had asked me twice to go to the theatre with him. On the last occasion I had said:

"Please don't ask me again; I must always refuse."

Only twice had I heard from Clark—once on my birthday and once when he wished my signature to some papers. Of course he sent me his check each month, but no word accompanied it.

On my birthday he wrote me, wishing me all happiness, and when he wrote for my signature he had added a few words. He hoped I was well, etc.

I thanked him and added just a few words wishing him happiness. But I said nothing when he sent the papers for me to sign. I signed where he indicated and returned them to him.

May came. Still I had no thought of returning. It was unusually warm for the time of year,

and a lassitude I could not understand nor control was creeping over me. I took the tonic mother had left for me, but I felt no effect. June came. Hot, stifling days at first when I felt it an effort to drag myself out of bed and to the office. Then came cooler days and I felt better. I laughed at myself for so easily giving up to my feelings. I wrote mother that I was really feeling fine, and I meant it. But at the first recurrence of the hot weather I wilted again. One day—about the middle of June I couldn't make myself get up.

Jennie telephoned the office. Then, without consulting me, for a doctor.

The doctor came. He was a kind-faced, elderly man, whom I felt I could trust.

"This won't do, you must stop work at once," he said, after I had answered his questions. "This hot weather is very enervating. You must be careful. Let your husband take care of you now."

After prescribing a remedy for my faintness he left, telling me to send for him should I not improve.

I had made no answer. I couldn't tell him that Clark—didn't know.

When he had gone I buried my face in the pillow and cried softly for ever so long. I wanted my mother, but more than all I wanted Clark, my husband, the father of my unborn child.

I remained quietly at home for two days. In that time I took account of myself. I realized for the first time how selfish I had been in running away

instead of trying to make myself contented. In a way I commenced to understand that I had cheated Clark. He had married me expecting a wife, a home-maker, a companion. I really had been none of these things. Not because I did not want to be, but because I wanted to be without effort on my part. I had not done my share.

At the end of two days I took up my work again in defiance of the old doctor's injunction. Yet even as I did so I knew that it could not last, that soon I must leave again. Then all suddenly there rushed over me a longing, a longing that would not be denied, the longing for my husband.

Day after day I fought it. I would not yet concede that I was ready to go back; that I could endure the monotony of it all. I could still close my eyes and visualize the black mountains as they were when I left, the broad acres without sign of habitation. And I still shuddered as I thought.

So I struggled. And daily the struggle grew harder; my strength to resist the longing for him, my husband, less. Then one day came the thought, awakening, illuminating. I had no right to stay away. I was cheating Clark.

I always had flattered myself that I played fair. I was not playing fair now. Almost I had made up my mind to tell Kenneth Hunt that I was going back, when a busy time came in the markets. I was needed. So I said nothing and June ran into July, the hot, stifling July of New York.

Now the thoughts of the bald mountains and the broad reaches of barren land left me. I remembered Clark's mountain, green and gold. I recalled the long rides we took when on Tomboy I would challenge him to a race. I thought of the big, cool, rose and gray room, the great living room, the soft-footed "China boys," and the old Mexican—all so efficient and so willing to wait on me, to do my bidding at any time. Then I compared all these things to the stifling heat, to the crowded subways, the smelly lunch room where on a stool I forced myself to eat that I might be able to work.

A great wave of nausea went over me. How could I ever have thought this life comparable to the free, wonderful life Clark had planned for me and—him.

Yet, strangely, I was not ready to return. I was not convinced that his was the better way—for me.

Then came a day when I could live alone no longer. I had gone down to the office as usual. But about eleven o'clock I said to Kenneth Hunt:

"I am going back."

"When, Sheila?"

"As soon as I can get there!"

Once more his face grew white as I told him I was going to leave him. By that sign I knew that he still loved, at least still cared for me, and I said with a recklessness I did not know I possessed:

"I must go! I want my husband!"

For a moment he was silent.

"Yes; Sheila, you must go."

He called his car and sent me home. He held my hands in his before I left as he had before; but this time he said nothing about my coming back. He knew I never would.

"God grant you happiness," he said; then let me go.

As I leaned back in the car, eyes closed, relaxed, a thought came that effectually made me sit up straight, every nerve taut.

"Suppose Clark had changed! That he no longer wanted me."

Then I laughed aloud. I felt I knew in every fiber of my being that he was the same, that he loved me. There was nothing else that counted. Just Clark's love and presence—only that.

When I reached home, Jennie's home, I called:

"Come help me pack, Jennie! I am going home."

"I am glad, Sheila."

Then she put her strong arms around me and told me many things; how there was nothing worth while but love; how children could only be a blessing when father and mother both welcomed them. I had never dreamed there was such a depth of sentiment in Jennie. Never realized the really wonderful mother and wife she was until then.

After my things were packed I went over to bid Mrs. Murphy good-bye. She said she would never forgive me were I to leave without seeing her. When I told her, she, too, dear old soul, took me in her arms.

"Thot's right, dearie. Go to your man."

I took the midnight train. Jim and Jennie went to the station with me, and Jim looked after my luggage while Jennie and I clung to each other, talking of solemn things to the last.

The night was close and hot, but I felt no discomfort. The journey was a long one, but each hour brought me nearer Clark and peace. It was fast growing dusk after a long bright day when I arrived. The valley was bathed in a soft, luminous haze just tinged with the rays of the setting sun. The mountain, Clark's mountain, rose like some protecting spirit watching over all in the valley which lay at its foot. I visualized the very spot where we had camped together. The tiny tent, the breakfast cooked over the hot stones, the bath in the running stream. Oh, would he be willing to take me there again? It was his Holy of Holies.

I stopped the car some distance from the house and told the driver to take my luggage around another way and to leave it at the back door. I went on afoot.

As always in hot weather the long French windows were open onto the broad veranda. Quietly I went up the steps, then around to the living room—Clark's favorite place for his after-dinner smoke.

I smelled his pipe and knew that I should find him. For the first time I hesitated. I grew weak, my knees knocked together. Then I remembered what I had to tell him, what I was bringing back to him, and went softly on.

The light from his pipe glowed like a firefly in the dark room. He was not reading as usual. Was he thinking of me, I wondered?

He stirred in his chair as I stepped through the window. I waited, thinking he might speak. But evidently he had not heard me. I crept to his side.

"Clark, I—have come back," I said as I knelt by his chair.

"I was waiting, dearest. You remember I said I would."

"Yes—and Clark, you will forgive me for all I have made you suffer, for all I have done in my mistaken stumbling after happiness, which was right here had I only known it. You will forgive me when you know."

He had drawn me up on his knee, and with his arms around me, his cheek close to mine, I whispered my wonder story. Then I said:

"Will you forgive me now and love me as you did before, Clark? For I love only you in the wide, wide world."

"I never have ceased to love you. There is nothing to forgive, my wife. You tried your wings, but you found your way back to the nest. Please God, I will make you so happy you will never care to try them again. Come, dear. The China boy will get you some supper. You must eat well or his feelings will be hurt."

THE END

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